Stars, Hide your Fires

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Stars, Hide your Fires

by EyesUpMarksman

Summary

Will is a Watcher: tasked with seeking out fallen angels and sending them to Limbo. But, the more time he spends on Earth, mingling with humanity, the more he appreciates the little quirks. He's eventually contacted by one of his siblings on behalf of Michael, who wants one particular fallen angel dead: an outcast now going by the name of Hannibal Lecter.

There's just one problem: Will has already met Hannibal Lecter. And he quite likes the creature.

Hannigram Angel/Demon!AU

Notes

Scenes largely inspired by the release of the Good Omen's TV trailer, an overactive imagination, and literally everything Alessia Pelonzi has ever drawn in regards to Hannigram.

Her Tumblr: alessiapelonzi.tumblr.com
Her Twitter: twitter.com/PixelsPlenty

Please head on over. She's amazing.

USERNAME CHANGE - QueenForADay = EyesUpMarksman

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

A loud crack of thunder rumbled through the desert. The air around them almost shook; the stones of the wall they waited on almost trembled. The two sons of God that stood on the Eastern gate cast their gazes up towards the sky. A long tendril of lightning flashed, illuminating the kingdom above the clouds of the briefest of moments.

One of the angels – a Watcher – felt his heart pang inside of his chest. It had been a while since he had seen the kingdom.

“Are you aware of what your job will be now, Watcher?” the angel at his side spoke: his own voice matching the tremor-like power of the thunder. He was bigger than the Watcher – taller by a head with heavy armour that clung to him like a second skin. His wings also had more plumage than the other angel.

The Watcher never took his gaze from the sky. “Yes.”

Their feathers ruffled at another sharp clap of thunder; this one louder and more powerful than the last. The heavy grey skies that slumped over the desert blinked with lights as more flashes of lightning sparked. For a brief moment, the Watcher wondered if the sky would catch fire: if an inferno would ignite and consume the entire sky.

“This is not for forever,” the other anger said. He brought his wings up and over his head, just in time to for the first fat raindrop to hit the earth. “Once they have been handed over, you may return.”

“By whose decree?”

“Michael’s.”

The Watcher couldn’t stop the souring of his face at the name. It was as if the very air around them suddenly turned rancid.

“And how long should this mission take?” The Watcher let the rain soak his hair and his skin. The simple robes which covered his body clung to him like a second skin once they became drenched.

The question hung between the two angels. The real meaning lay quietly underneath: *how many were cast out?*

The larger angel remained quiet. “It shouldn’t take long, if you’re diligent,” was his only reply.

The sky above them cracked and rumbled and heaved until it suddenly seized. A long ripple of bright light forced the grey clouds to rip apart, revealing a blue sky underneath. All at once, the first fell.

Out of the clouds came a long streak of blazing light; red and orange, the very colour of fire. It streaked through the dark sky, reaching for one of the four corners of the world. The Watcher's feathers ruffled.

More streaks of light burst through the sky: streamline and sleek. Once the first beam of light hit the ground, the earth beneath their bare feet shuddered. And then there was another shake. And another.

"I have work to attend to with Father," the angel by the Watcher's side said after a moment, finally turning from the desert to look back to the lush garden behind them. "Go now, Watcher. I'll be looking forward to your return home."

The thing is, the Watcher thought after a while, is that he didn't really *want* to return home anymore. He did at one point. In the first few weeks of his employment, he wanted to return to his siblings more than anything. He could always feel them peering over his shoulder as he sought out and found whoever it was he was tracking that day. He could hear them whisper into his ear as he led his catch to Limbo. But they never stood in front of him. What he experienced were merely afterimages.

His job that should have only taken a few weeks – or a few months, at worst – was starting to take years. The sheer number of fallers during that night scattered into the winds and hid within the world. Quite frankly, it was getting annoying. Most didn't make it far from the desert, though: choosing to recuperate in the homes of the daughters of men. That's where the Watcher almost always found them.

Until the word spread that there was a Watcher sent by Michael to lead fallen into Limbo.

Then those who had fallen fled further into the world: upturning rocks and hills and trees to hide beneath. They left behind lovers and their half-breed offspring; humans and creatures that the Watcher chose to leave alone. He wasn't there for them.

He could find fallen everywhere; hidden within different landscapes and events. Battles were the fallen preference. And that's why the Watcher found himself in too many suits of armour in too many crusades and invasions and rebellions that spanned centuries.

And as time churned on, and the scale of this mission grew too grand, something began to grow and fester within his mind: doubt. Did the Angel on the Eastern Gate send him on a mission he knew would be never-ending? Is it as fruitless as the Watcher currently thinks? As soon as he finds one fallen, another will rear its head from a hiding place not far away, and burrow deeper into the sand.

He was visited by one of his siblings.

“Michael wants to know how you’re doing,” a son of God asks when he meets the Watcher in a *dormus* in Ancient Rome. It’s not the one from the wall of the garden; he probably has his own problems to contend with. Instead who visits him is one of his younger siblings; an angel with a simple mind and a fondness for Father’s fauna.

The Watcher found himself unable to turn his brother away. “That doesn’t sound like something Michael would ask. He probably sent you to ask why I wasn’t finished yet.”

The other angel looked down at the marble flooring of the house. House-slaves bustled around them.

The Watcher smiled fondly. “You’re the one who wants to know if I’m fine, yes?”

A light blush dusted the top of his brother’s cheeks.

“I’m fine, Peter,” the Watcher places his hand on the other’s shoulder. That was the last time anyone had checked in on him. If not for the whispers in his ears every ten minutes, he would have thought himself alone on this plain.

Empires rose and fell and rose again around him as he continued to trudge through the world. Fallen hid themselves in society – some in historical scenes. He found one with the bloodied knife used to kill Caesar gripped in his hand. Another had been helping *Vlad the Impaler* with solidifying his namesake. Another had been tossing crates of tea from the ships in Boston harbour. Wherever there was a conflict, that’s where he would find them.

The problem was that the entire world and its history was one never-ending conflict. Fallen would be in armies of opposing countries because the other country had done something awful to theirs. The Watcher often found himself glancing up at the sky, hoping for a snippet of the kingdom above, just so he could gloat: “you had been so proud of your perfect creations. Now, look at them. First the Garden Incident, and now this.”

But he wouldn’t. Such a blasphemous action would surely cost him his wings. And he could never return home. But now, several hundred years from when he first started, is that he can’t really remember what home is. The kingdom is nothing but a blur to him now: an afterimage in his mind. His siblings are nothing more now than faint whispers in his ears. And, if he’s going to be perfectly honest with himself, he quite likes this world. It’s quirky. It’s at one point, when most of the fallen had been sent on their way, that he decides to slow down: to appreciate the world evolving and changing around him. He watches the creation of religions and witnesses them divide and conflict with each other.

He is still a Watcher, he reasons with the voices one night: the rumbling explosions of canons just outside the window of his apartment in 18th century Paris doing nothing to quell them. Rather than watching for fallers hiding within the world Father built, he watches said world evolve and change. If anything, he recommends that the rest of his siblings follow his example. And when he says that, he smiles, because he knows somewhere Michael has just burst a vein in his temple.

At some point, he gained the ability to sleep. The angel who gave him this job made sure that something like sleep wouldn’t get in the way of his efficiency. How he then suddenly

acquired the ability to slip into a slumber is beyond him. But as he lies in his bed, eyes focused on the embossed ceiling of his room, he finds sleep starting to pull at him.

As long as he has his wings, his siblings are able to find him. That's the problem with still having them. Humans can't see them. Even as they drag behind him, even as he spent the first few months on earth learning how to navigate the world around him with them on his back, they're invisible to humans. He could find a fallen based on their instinct to look away from his eyes to the wings behind his back: a slight movement of their eyes, but a movement that would always give them away.

So it doesn't shock him when he steps into his London apartment and finds the Angel from the Eastern Gate standing in his living room; casting an inquisitive gaze at the paintings perched on the walls. He wears civilian clothes – as all Earth-wandering angels do. Clad in a simple white, pressed shirt and dark suit pants and blazer and polished shoes, he almost looks a part of the world outside. If not for the red roan wings that twitch at his back.

"You know, letting yourself into my apartment when I'm not here isn't intimidating. It's rude," the Watcher says, moving from the entrance hallway into the kitchen. He stopped being Afraid of the Eastern Gate angel a long time ago. Now, he's just an inconvenience.

The angel quirks an eyebrow at him. It's a change from the ever-present scowl that's been etched into his face since those days on the wall watching the first of the fallers. "You've been avoiding me."

"Have I?"

"Don't play stupid with me, Watcher." The angel folds his arms in front of his broad chest. "Or should I refer to you by your earth name now? Since you've grown so fond of it."

As much as he likes to argue and play with the Angel of the Eastern Gate, the Watcher has to admit that it's true. At some point during his decision to stay in this plain, he decided to adopt a name. For the past number of years he's been running by a collection of names: most of them never really fitting properly.

He eventually adopted the name Will Graham, and that's the one that stuck.

Will can feel his wings tremor at the tone of the other angel's voice. There's something lying beneath it. "You told me to watch for trouble," he reasons, nodding to a tall lancet window in his living room that looks out on to London's centre, "and I'm watching."

The Eastern Gate Angel scowls. "This is not what I meant, and you know that, you damn fledgling." The open-plan layout of the kitchen and living room make it possible for the angel

to clear the space in a matter of strides. With an outstretched finger, the angel growls, “when I sent you here, it was to complete a duty. Not to take some sort of extended vacation.”

Will doesn’t let the words settle before he cast the other angel an unimpressed look. “You surely haven’t sought me out now to tell me off, have you?”

The question only makes the scowl on the angel’s face deepen. The roan coloured wings at his back flap: a primal show of aggression. “Michael wanted to have a word with you,” he says lowly, “and we both know what he means by that. Don’t we, *Watcher*?”

Will would be dragged out in front of his siblings, have his wings ripped from his spine, and tossed over the edge of the kingdom’s borders to plummet. Siblings have been cast out over less. Michael’s temper does tend to flare into something deadly.

Will doesn’t let the pang of fear show on his face. “So why is it that you’re here instead of Michael?”

“He wants you to find someone,” the angel says, stepping back from Will, “a fallen that’s unaccounted for.”

Will isn’t going to lie to the other angel. He knows that he hasn’t found them all. He made peace with the fact that there were too many cast-outs that night. And that that night wasn’t the only night that his siblings were thrown from the sky. As he travelled, he witnessed more nights where fiery light would streak across the skies. The humans that surrounded him called them shooting stars. But within the heads of those beams, he could see the flailing bodies of his siblings, flailing through the air trying to use the wings that were steadily being ripped from their backs. The tails of the comets that the humans admired so greatly were simply the wings of his siblings being scattered to the wind.

There’s a lot of fallen that are ‘unaccounted for’. They’re the ones Will never bothered looking for. They had integrated so well into human life that he either couldn’t find them, or if he did, he witnessed them being happy and content. And he couldn’t take them away. He remembers stumbling across a village in Basra where he caught his first good look at the half-bred children of the sons of God and daughters of men. One young girl, the body of a five-year-old already and identical to those around her, played in the middle of the dusty street. Her father – a fallen Will had been tracking for almost three weeks – watched from the opening of their home. The injuries from the fall were obviously freshly healed: a slight bruise still lingering under his eye and a slight limp as he started to move away from the door.

But Will focused on the fallen’s face: he’d watched his child with a fondness in his eyes that made Will’s fingers twitch by his side. He was one of the first Fallen Will had left alone.

The air in his apartment suddenly feels charged with electricity. The presence of angels tends to change the elements around them: particularly one as powerful as the Angel from the Eastern Gate.

“He’s been earth-bound since the first purge,” the angel explains, turning away from Will to prowl through the rest of the apartment, “and he’s been causing problems.” The angel takes in

the apartment. Will has lived here for a couple of years. He's been thinking of uprooting and moving again. It's nothing new: he needs to move on when human friends he's acquired over the years wonder why he hasn't aged a day while they start to wrinkle and turn grey.

Will keeps his attention focused on the angel, watching closely as he stalks around the open-planned living room. "What kind of problems has he been causing?"

He hears the angel huff a dry laugh. "Problems. That's all Michael said." One painting catches the angel's attention. Hanging between two lancet windows that look out on to the metropolitan cityscape of London is a framed Francisco Goya's *Saturn Devouring His Son*. Will bites the inside of his cheek. The painting always appealed to his irony. When he first spotted it plastered along a wall of Goya's home during one of his many visits to the artist during the 1820s, he examined it just as closely as the Angel of the Eastern Gate seems to be examining it now. The roan coloured wings at the angels back twitch. "Is this what passes for art in their world?" the angel asks, nodding his head towards the city.

Will folds his arms over his chest. "I like it. It certainly holds a type of symbolism."

The angel merely huffs before turning back to face Will. If he even registered the thinly veiled threat hidden behind Will's words, he doesn't acknowledge it. "You really do like it in this world, don't you?"

The arms across Will's chest tighten.

The angel sets his jaw. "Michael wanted me to bring you home, after you had completed this last job. I managed to dissuade him of that." The angel looks around the room again. "You can stay on Earth, if you like. When you finish this job for him, he'll send no more of our siblings to bother you again."

He doesn't believe it for one moment. "And the invisible eyes and quiet voices," Will gestures to one of his ears, "will they all stop?"

The angel regards him for a moment. He eventually nods. "I'll make sure Gabriel knows not to bother you with any more messages."

It still doesn't sit right with him. He's grown used to the invisible eyes watching him and the voices whispering into his ear. They don't necessarily tell him anything useful. They just remind him that someone at home is keeping an eye on him. Still...

"If it'll make angels like you stop inviting yourselves into my home." Will sighs through his nose. He picks at a stray strand fraying from the sleeve of his sweater. Keeping his eyes focused on that, he sniffs. "Do you have any information on this specific fallen?"

"He fell with the first outcasts and landed in what we now know as Lithuania," the angel says, clasping his hands in front of him. It manages to make his frame look even bigger. "We know he's moved since then. He's like you, in that regard." The angel then reaches into the inside of his jacket to take out a small object wrapped in a black cloth. "The last time he had been spotted was in a city in the U.S. When you find him, Azrael recommends that you use this to help with your mission."

The angel holds the cloth-covered object towards Will. When Will takes it, he's surprised at how weighty it is in his hand. He slowly uncoils a simple silver chain wrapped around the parcel: this is definitely Azrael's work, then. He moves the cloth away and blinks at the object.

A dagger: not overly decorated, but practical. The metal of the blade is sleek and shimmering: almost glowing. When stray beams of light hit it, it glimmers. Along the blade, he sees the etchings of his native script embellished into a long line, stretching from the pommel to the tip of the blade. The handle fits into his grip perfectly. Will raises his gaze to the angel. "You want me to kill him?"

All that he gets as a reply is a shrugged shoulder. "Michael may have stated that he doesn't particularly care if *this* particular fallen reaches Limbo's gates." The angel's expression hardens. "But he doesn't want him occupying this plain any longer."

There's a pregnant pause between them.

"Do you understand, Watcher?" the angel's voice is hard.

Will curls his fingers around the handle of the dagger, tightening his grip. "I understand." He raises his gaze from the blade to look at the angel directly. He doesn't miss how the angel's eyes flash gold. "Anything else you can tell me about him?"

"He's living under an assumed persona, just as you are." The angel's wings unfold slightly behind his back. "He's somewhere within the U.S. That's all Gabriel knows. That and a name: Hannibal Lecter."

Chapter 2

“Michael ordered me to kill you."

Here’s the thing about being immortal in a small world like the earth plain: you’re going to run into people *at least* twice. If you happen to be an immortal angel, you’ll run into an immortal fallen more often than that. That’s why, when the Angel of the Eastern Gate had finally vanished from Will’s apartment, he could finally let out the held breath he felt like he’s been holding for hours.

He’s met Hannibal before: countless times. Their meetings stretch over the course of time they’ve both spent on the earth. In every corner of the world where Will found himself, he could be sure that Hannibal was there too.

When Will lived in a *dormus* in one of the wealthier districts of ancient Rome, he could find Hannibal observing brutal gladiator matches from the emperor’s box: seated at his right hand with the rest of the council. He’s seen Hannibal in the courts of Tudor royalty in England, in the medic tents of Napoleon’s invasion on Russia. Hannibal’s current home is a lavish three-story townhouse in Baltimore, Maryland: next-door to an equally lavish, Gothic-style cathedral that Will merely scoffed at: *Seriously?* The fallen has been masquerading as a psychiatrist for the past couple of years. It can be added to the list of occupations he’s had over the centuries.

They both stood at the front door to the house for a moment: Will’s eyes baring into the fallen’s to let him in, the fallen mulling over the words that have just tumbled out of Will’s mouth.

Hannibal’s only reply was a small nod. “Alright then,” he said as he stepped out of the way, gesturing to the Watcher to enter.

The fallen now pours out two glasses of wine. Will almost stops him: he needs something stronger than wine. Alcohol has never been able to affect him too badly, but it does numb the nerves a bit. Ever since stepping inside Hannibal’s home, he’s been pacing the length of the man’s office. Once eventually coaxed into sitting on one of the plush armchairs, he drums his fingertips against the leather armrest. The silence between them is broken by the occasional crackle of the fire and the pouring of drinks.

“Michael ordered you to kill me,” Hannibal mulls over the words. The fallen regards Will with a slight glance over his shoulder. “And yet, there you sit: not killing me,” he remarks calmly, finally turning around with two wine glasses in his hands.

“And here I sit...not killing you,” Will sighs as takes the glass and immediately takes a sip of the wine. It’s going to take more glasses if the nibbling anxiousness racking through his bones is going to ebb away. He can feel the dagger pressing into his side: concealed in a simple sheath beneath the left lapel of his jacket.

Hannibal turns on his heel, stalking over to his own seat opposite Will's. "You've had opportunities over the years to rid the earth of my presence," Hannibal says into the bowl of his own glass. He takes a measured sip, letting the flavour of the wine dance along his tongue before swallowing it. "And you never acted upon those opportunities...why not?"

Will bites the inside of his cheek. He has no answer, but to raise his glass to his lips again and take a larger gulp of wine. When he can feel the faint wisp of warmth starting to flow through his veins, he sighs. "At some point, I decided that I didn't want to do that job anymore."

One of the fallen's eyebrows arch. "A dangerous statement to make." Hannibal knows about that, though. He was there when Will decided to distance himself from the orders of his elder siblings. On more than one occasion, their brief interactions revolved around Will asking how can one remove irritating voices in their heads telling them to get back to work. Hannibal didn't have an answer. *The voices left me alone once my wings were ripped from my back*, he had said a couple of years later when they met again, *though, I confess, it's not the first option I would try out.*

Will had seen the backs of one too many fallen as he escorted them to Limbo. Two ragged lines ran down the expanse of their backs, some of them bloodied and dripping as their owners were freshly fallen. Some of them had found daughters of men to sew them together: the result often being mangled, infected ridges of flesh held together by poor stitches.

As he takes another gulp of wine, he considers ridding himself of his wings. It's not the first time the thought has passed through his mind.

And it probably won't be the last.

Will finishes the last of his wine. "My question to you is *why* does Michael want you dead?" He tilts his head. "I can understand that you're one of the fallers, and you've been here since the first purging. But why mention you specifically?"

At that, Hannibal raises one shoulder in an elegant slight shrug. "I suppose I must have done something to rile his anger," is the only reply he gets, before Hannibal stands up to refill Will's glass. "Michael has always had a terrible temper."

There's no point in keeping the dagger where it is, anyway. He's not going to kill Hannibal. He made that decision centuries ago when he first spotted him. There was something about his eyes – a blood red back then – that made him consider just leaving the fallen alone. He wasn't creating chaos like the others. Though, Will thinks as he watches the fallen pour more wine from a decanter, he's pretty sure Hannibal has done a fair bit of meddling. Still, where others have picked up swords and guns and waged wars, Hannibal has merely prodded at the human mind; curious and inquisitive.

"You don't plan on killing me," Hannibal says matter-of-factly, "yet you seek me out, regardless. Was it to warn me of Michael's bounty on my head? Or something else?"

Will sighs through his nose. He reaches into his jacket and unhooks the dagger's sheath from his waist. For such a concealed and small object, it draws the attention of both of them to it.

As Hannibal hands over the wine glass, he regards the dagger resting on the glass table beside the angel. “A Watcher’s blade,” he hums, “made out of *adamas*, I presume?”

Will nods.

The slightly exposed blade catches a gleam from the light of the chandelier overhead. Hannibal knows not to touch it. A Watcher’s blade is his own: as are most forged weapons. Once it belongs to a particular angel, it’s theirs. Other angels are forbidden to take it.

Fallen will injure themselves if they even try to pick it up. What briefly flashes before Will’s eyes is the one time a fallen tried using his own blade against him: he can remember how quickly the fallen had dropped the blade, how it had collapsed to the ground, clutching its hand to its chest, and writhed in pain. *Adamas* is always blessed by the smiths: by Azrael himself.

Will runs a hand over his face, suddenly growing tired as his anxiety over this entire situation starts to drift away. “He said if I killed you, I could return home.”

Hannibal frowns slightly. “Michael?”

He shakes his head. “The angel who guarded the Eastern Gate.” Will shrugs. “On Michael’s behalf.” He perches his chin on a closed fist, looking at one particular wall of Hannibal’s office. Shelves packed with books stretch from the floor to the ceiling. A small mezzanine juts out from the higher up shelves. Will spots a couple of worn-leather tomes. “Why do you have a draft of the Book of Revelation stowed away in your shelves?” he says slowly, pointing at one particular shelf within the mezzanine.

Hannibal looks up to where Will points. “It’s not a draft,” he says simply.

It takes everything in Will not to roll his eyes. “Please tell me you don’t have the *actual* Book of Revelation?” he sighs.

Hannibal doesn’t answer; but with that, Will gets the answer he didn’t want in the first place. He groans before taking another sip of wine. Because of extensive research done throughout the centuries, he’s learned how much alcohol it takes to make him feel drunk. One too many raucous nights in Greece with *aristoi* in their homes and vineyards taught him all he needed to know about testing his limits.

He considers raiding the wine cellar he knows Hannibal to have below the foundations of the house. Hannibal’s own drink is almost gone before they speak again.

“So, Watcher,” Hannibal says, sitting forward in his chair and resting his elbows on his knees, “what do you plan on doing with me?”

Will puts his glass down beside his dagger: which, to be perfectly honest, he’d momentarily forgotten that it was even there in the first place. His gaze lingers on it for a moment, before he sighs, and turns back to face Hannibal. He shrugs a shoulder.

Hannibal looks over to one side of his office. Two tall lancet windows look out on to the street outside. Night has long fallen, with the only light illuminating neighbouring townhouses being the soft warm glow of street lamps. “Michael will have ordered Gabriel to keep eyes on you,” Hannibal says, clasping his hands in front of him, “and we both know how thorough Gabriel and his doves can be.”

Will hums and tilts his head back to gaze up at the ceiling. It’s high and vaulted, like one that belongs in a towering and reaching cathedral.

“Do you wish to go home?” Hannibal suddenly asks.

Will almost snorts. “Fuck no,” he snarls into the bowl of his glass.

A small smile tugs at the corner of Hannibal’s mouth. “You’d be the first earth-bound angel to turn down an offer like that.”

Will frowns slightly: his eyebrows drawing together. “You’ve met more than one, then?”

The fallen shrugs a shoulder. “You aren’t the only son of God to be given a mission to complete. That’s all I’ll say on the matter.”

*Why does Michael want **you** dead?* Will thinks as he holds Hannibal’s gaze for a short, silent moment. *Do you know something? What could you possibly know that has Michael so worried?*

Hannibal sits backs into his seat and crosses one leg over the other. “You’re lost,” he says as a conclusion, “you’re lost and you don’t know what to do.”

Will huffs. “Lost.”

“You are.” Hannibal nods firmly. “You say you don’t want to return home. I’ve seen you spend centuries living within this world, knowingly ignoring a duty bestowed upon you by our commander.”

Will’s throat suddenly starts turning dry. It’s getting increasingly difficult to swallow.

“What do you want, Will?”

Will manages to dislodge the lump that’s embedding itself into his throat. “I want,” he replies slowly, “to never return home. I want to stay here.”

Hannibal’s expression doesn’t change. “How would you go about ensuring that, then?”

Various articles of clothing lay scattered and forgotten about in their path towards Hannibal's bedroom. They tangled in each other as they navigated through the dark house, climbing up stairs carefully and feeling along a hallway with an outstretched hand. When they reach Hannibal's room, the fallen wastes no time in hoisting the angel into his arms and depositing him down in the middle of the bed.

Will gasps at the first breach. He's lain with daughters of men in the years of his divorce from his job. He found himself suddenly engrossed with urges that could only be sated by bedding one of those creatures. The fallen had done it: even taken them on as mates and mothers of their young.

But he'd never lain with a son of man.

He'd never even thought to lay with a son of God.

The first few thrusts are gentle: as gentle as the lips that Hannibal drags across Will's exposed neck and collarbone. "Beautiful creature," are the two words that the fallen breathes into Will's shoulder as he lets his hand wander up and down the other's side.

As Hannibal's body looms over and covers his own, almost shielding him, Will glances straight up at the roof. It isn't lost on him how, just beyond the perfectly plastered ceiling, are the prying eyes of Gabriel's own larks staring right back at him.

Heat pools in the core of his stomach.

He brushes his nose along the tip of Hannibal's ear, making sure his lips are against the shell. "Fuck me," he breathes, "*let them see*." He hooks his leg firmly over Hannibal's hips, urging the fallen on.

Hannibal tucks his face into the junction of Will's neck and shoulder, grunting, as he starts to snap his hips harder and harder until the frame of the bed starts to tremble. Will's eyelids clench shut at the change of pace. A choked off sob escapes his throat.

After a few more harsh thrusts, Will's eyes open again. The light sheet that once covered them is now slipping down Hannibal's lower back. Will catches it with his foot and kicks it to the side.

Let them see.

He manages to place his trembling hands to Hannibal's chest, pushing firmly against the fallen's pectorals. "Stop, stop," he breathes, keeping his lips close to the other's. Hannibal lifts himself from Will's chest by planting his hands on either side of Will's head. The angel's touch remains on his chest. Plastered across his face is a determined look. "Lie down," he gasps, letting his legs fall from bracketing Hannibal's hips. He barely manages to hide the wince as the fallen slips out of him and lies down, resting his head on an assortment of pillows at the crown of the bed.

Will wastes no time straddling the fallen's hips and throwing his arms around Hannibal's neck. Hannibal frames his face with his hands before pulling Will into a kiss. Will can't stop

the feral groan that wrenches itself from his throat. Hannibal's hands find the angel's hip bones, guiding him gently over his length.

Once Will sinks back down, Hannibal keeps his hands firmly on the angel's hips to keep him moving. "Come up here," Will breathes, looping one arm firmly around Hannibal's shoulders. The tops of two scars gently graze his forearm.

Something erupts within his chest: raw and unbound. Will drops his head to rest his forehead against Hannibal's bare shoulder. Rage. It's pure rage. Rage at every son of God that still sits within the kingdom.

It's been bubbling within him for years.

He wants to shout out. *Fuck it. Fuck it all to Hell and back. Fuck Gabriel. Raphael. Uriel. Barachiel. The whole* ***fucking*** *lot of them.*

Leaning back, he stares straight up at the ceiling. Will lets out a groan at the sudden change of angle: how the slight shift has caused Hannibal's length to start hitting a spot within him. Hannibal's grip on his hips tightens to the point of bruising.

"Devious minx," Hannibal growls against Will's lips, one hand raised to cup the back of Will's head. He gasps when Will clenches around him. "What would Michael say if he saw you writhing like a succubus?"

"H-Hannibal," the angel gasps, tilting his head back. He groans when the fallen grazes sharp teeth along his throat. Some distant part of him, that's currently being chased away by pleasure, *wants* Michael to be watching. He doesn't want Gabriel or his larks telling the eldest of the sons.

He wants Michael to see for himself.

The wine that had flooded his system, and the alcohol that seeped into his very blood, have now evaporated away. He's of sound mind. He's never thought so clearly in all of his long and eternal life. A laugh suddenly bubbles up through his throat at the thought – choked off by a sharp moan when Hannibal's hips begin to snap into his again. There's a feral growl from the fallen: almost lost among the slapping of flesh against flesh.

Will stares right up at the ceiling: hoping that his siblings are in fact watching, just so Gabriel can relay one message to his eldest brother.

As his vision starts to blur, the edges turning a brilliant white, as his very blood starts to erupt into flame, Will's voice breaks.

Go fuck yourself, Michael.

“You insolent little whore!” Michael’s voice is thunderous around the throne room. Father isn’t here. At least Will has that to hang on to.

Will’s head then whips to the side with the force of the hit. Droplets of crimson blood tinged with gold splatter against the white marble flooring of the consulate. Seven embellished marble thrones crowd around him in a semi-circle. In each one there’s an archangel perched, regarding him with hard and stony expressions. Out of the corner of his good eye, Will can make out the large shape of the Angel from the Eastern Gate standing to the side with the rest of his siblings at the nave of the consulate: hands folded in front of him and expressionless. Will thought that the Angel of the Eastern Gate might even crack a small smug smile. He’d been the one to pluck Will from the streets and drag him here in the first place.

His siblings, especially the younger ones, are all in various stages of shock. Whether it’s relating to Will’s relations with a fallen or how badly Michael is beating him, he isn’t quite sure.

Michael, a hulking blurred figure with large white, blinding plumage for wings, stalks around him. “You are in the consulate, *fledgling*. Do you really have nothing to say for yourself?!”

Through the thrumming pain coursing through the right side of his face, he opens and closes his mouth: making sure the pommel of Michael’s sword didn’t just crack his jaw into pieces. Ribbons of spit and blood flow from his mouth and splatter on to the ground. “I’m....I’m sorry,” he mumbles. His swelling lip and cheek make it difficult to get the words out. He sees Michael’s bare feet in front of him. Will’s head is then yanked upwards by a tight grip in his hair.

“What did you say?” the archangel hisses, his voice like pure venom.

“I’m sorry,” he grunts, wincing at how Michael’s grip tightens. Will manages to open his eyes – or one of them, at least. The other is starting to be sealed shut by a forming swell from the impact. Michael’s eyes – once a brilliant gold – are practically glowing crimson. Behind him, his broad white wings are flared out.

The archangel growls. “If you wish to confess, Watcher, then make your voice loud enough for your siblings and Father to hear.”

Will swallows thickly. “I’m sorry,” he says a bit louder. His voice doesn’t echo around the halls as Michael’s does. He swallows again: sure that spit and blood are now caking the back of his throat. “I’m sorry...that I didn’t do it sooner.” Gathering his last bit of strength, he wells a glob of saliva in his mouth before spitting it – or at least, attempting to – at Michael’s face. The archangel is too quick, but it does manage to hit the archangel’s bare feet.

The silence within the consulate is deafening.

Suddenly and all at once, Will is hauled up to his feet. One of Michael’s hands grabs tightly around his upper arm, unforgiving in the way that he squeezes his flesh. Once on his feet, the archangel grabs the shoulder of his robe and hauls him down the vast nave of the consulate:

past Will's siblings. The cherubim, dominions, virtues, powers all watch him be dragged away by the shoulder. At some point, his legs go out from under him.

Michael still drags him along, barely acknowledging the fact that Will has stumbled. The brilliant white marble of the consulate seems all too blinding now. Suddenly he can hear echoing voices behind him. He looks over his shoulder to see some of his siblings storm out into the aisle of the consulate: crying out to the remaining seated archangels for Will's wings to be spared.

His wings flap wildly behind him: but they're eventually beaten into submission by Michael's own flaring out to full expansion in an act of dominance. Michael drags him as easily as he would if he were holding a child by the scruff of the neck. He suddenly halts, and Will's barely able to catch a breath before one of Michael's loud booming voice thunders out again.

"With the power conferred upon me by our most glorious Father, I, Michael, hereby denounce the Watcher before me. I strip him of all otherworldly powers gifted to him by our Father. I declare that upon banishment, he is to never return to our kingdom until the sun rises in the west and sets in the east."

Will's able to lift his head for a brief moment. He's no longer in the halls of the consulate, but rather, on the edge of the great bridge that spans and stretches outwards into the different realms of creation. When he lowers his head, he's able to see the swirling of clouds beneath the bridge. The white turns a vile and dull grey before they start to part.

With a strength only ever held by Michael, he lifts Will up by the throat, and dangles him over the edge of the bridge: as if he weighed nothing at all. Will's hands scrabble for purchase at the archangel's arms, his vambraces. He lashes out with his legs to see if he can at least lock on to something.

"I call the sons of God to witness to witness this judgement," Michael's voice suddenly starts to grow louder and louder, before all Will can hear is a loud screeching in his ears.

And all at once, Michael lets go.

Chapter 3

He can remember how the clouds parted around him as he fell towards the earth.

He can remember the flare of light that engulfed him on his journey down.

He can remember the short sharp seer of white-hot pain that shocked through his back.

He can remember how the earth trembled and rippled as his body crashed into it.

But he can't remember how he ended up in Hannibal's home.

The familiar sight of Hannibal's bedroom surrounds him as he surfaces to consciousness. He lies on his stomach, head turned towards the large bay window that looks out on to the street that runs in front of the house. Outside, he can see the orange glow of street lamps illuminating the darkness. Just beyond that, he can see the blinking of stars.

His heart suddenly pangs.

"You're awake."

It's not a question, or a statement. It's not really anything, to be honest. Will manages to turn his head, wincing at the slight ripple of pain that suddenly shoots through his spine and shoulders at the movement. Standing at the doorway, holding a bowl of water, clean cloths, and a small box is Hannibal.

Will swallows.

He expected to see Hannibal's usual expression: all but unreadable, except for a small hint of a smile that lifts a corner of his lip. But now, the fallen's eyes are soft as he runs his gaze over Will's body. His gaze eventually stops over Will knows are two open wounds on his back.

But he's never seen the fallen look so lost in his life.

The bowl holds a small volume of warm water. Wordlessly, Hannibal drenches the first of the cloth in it before leaving it at the edge of the bowl. He then turns to the box. It's small and made out of mahogany. When Hannibal opens the box, Will manages to a quick peek inside.

Nestled among dark satin-like fabric are a simple needle and syringe and a couple of small bottles of clear liquid. Hannibal plucks the instruments out of the box and quietly pieces them together. The bed shifts slightly as Hannibal perches himself on the side of the bed, just by Will. Even the light jostle of the mattress underneath him makes Will wince.

"There will be pain," the fallen mumbles, focusing on drawing out a suitable dosage of a clear liquid from one of the small bottles. "But this should help dull the senses."

Will just turns his head and presses his face into the pillow. There's a moment of calm before he can feel a needle pierce into the wound. It takes everything within him not to scream. He

throws up a hand and grabs on to the wooden headboard of the bed. His knuckles turn white almost instantly.

And as soon as the needle is in, it's out again. Replacing it is the warm press of Hannibal's hand on the uninjured skin of his back. "Hush, now," he soothes, running the fingers of his other hand through Will's hair, "that'll take a moment to take effect."

It takes a few minutes, but suddenly the pain coursing through his back slowly starts to ebb away into a minor dull ache. His eyelids feel heavy and he turns his head to the side. The fingers in his hair comb through his curls. "Sleep," Hannibal's voice is low, coaxing, "you'll need rest."

Distantly, he feels Hannibal start to move away from him as sleep begins to drag him under. He blearily watches Hannibal reach for and unfurl the damp cloth. The sound of water dripping into the bowl is the last thing he hears before he's dragged into darkness.

When he wakes, there's a single beam of white morning light starting to creep along the dark floorboards of the room. It manages to break into the room through a slight gap in the curtains. Hannibal must have pulled them during the night.

At the thought of the fallen, Will lifts his head from the pillow. The movement sends a single shockwave of pain down his spine.

"Try not to move too much."

Will turns his head and spots Hannibal sitting – or, slouching – in an armchair near the side of the bed. Between his hands and resting on his knee is a book, splayed open. It looks worn. Will wonders if it's from downstairs – or did Hannibal already have it in the room. Would he even take a moment to leave Will's side as he lay there, flayed open and vulnerable?

"Our wings act as secondary arms," Hannibal says, closing his book, "they're attached to the scapula in our back. Losing wings is something akin to losing a limb."

There's something else. Never has he felt this tired. He's barely able to keep his eyes open to look at Hannibal. He's barely able to take on the words the fallen is speaking. All he wants to do is sleep.

"Without our wings, we lose what makes us Father's firstborns." Hannibal shuffles forward to sit at the edge of his chair. He places the book on the top of the bedside cabinet. Already on it are some items: the bowl from last night, and a pile of folded, clean, and dry flannels. "Your wounds will take a while to heal. I'm afraid that once the wings go, as do most of our abilities: including our power to heal quickly."

Will winces as he feels Hannibal graze the tips of his fingers along his covered back. “I’ve managed to stitch your wounds, but I’ll need to change the dressings soon. You’ve already bled through several during the night.”

There’s a dull throbbing pain in his upper back: where his wings should be. He tries to move his shoulders slightly, and gasps when the pain becomes too much.

“You’re going to be bedbound for a while, unfortunately,” Hannibal says. Will knew as much. From observing fallen for centuries, he knows what the toll of these injuries will be to his body. But it’s one thing to observe: it’s another to experience. There’s a dull persistent throb of pain that’s swirling up and down his back. His gaze is drawn towards the window just behind Hannibal.

“What time is it?” Will rasps. They’re the first words that have managed to leave his throat. He’s somewhat surprised to find that even that is hurting. As he clears his throat, he remembers the beating Michael gave him before being cast out. Most of the pain he’s feeling is stemming from his back, but he can feel a small pick of sensation as he raises his brow.

Hannibal glances down at his watch. “Nine thirty.”

There’s a sharp knock on the bedroom door. The sound of it shatters the almost peaceful air that had settled between the two of them. Will barley has a chance to respond before one of Hannibal’s warm hands gently presses on his upper arm. “Be still,” he says, getting up from the chair, “it’s only a friend.” When Hannibal starts to move away, Will swallows down a whine that threatens to escape his throat. As gently as he can, he moves his head to face towards the door of the room.

His ears prick at the sound of two voices: Hannibal’s and someone else’s. A female’s. It’s accented.

Hannibal steps back into the room, but this time, followed by a woman who trails after him. Will’s eyes widen slightly. “Chiyoh?” he rasps.

Her eyes instantly go to the mound of bandages on his back. She sets her jaw before turning to Hannibal. “When would you deem him fit for travel?”

The fallen sighs gently through his nose. “I’ll have to check his wounds to see if there are any improvements.” His words are measured. “But it will be another couple of days before I can even move him on to his side.”

It’s apparently not the answer Chiyoh wanted. She clicks her tongue. “You said that you wanted to be out of Baltimore before the new moon.”

“I didn’t think his injuries would be that severe. I didn’t count on Michael being this vicious,” Hannibal says, turning his head slightly to speak the words directly at her. Her expression doesn’t change in the slightest. With both of their eyes on him, Will feels more exposed than he’s ever been.

Hannibal seems to notice. With a small gesture, he leads both himself and Chiyoh back out of the room and into the hallway. He closes the door behind him. Will strains to listen. He can't make out their conversation: whether it's because of their hushed voices or the persistent ringing in his ears or a combination of both of those things, he isn't sure. But it isn't long before the door creaks open again and Hannibal steps inside.

Will swallows. "You want to move?"

Hannibal nods, walking back towards the chair at Will's bedside. "I'm not quite sure if Michael knew where to let you fall, or if it was just a coincidence," Hannibal says, looking over to the windows of the bedroom. "But I want to take precautions."

It's lost on Will for a moment. When his sluggish brain finally catches up with Hannibal's words, Hannibal sighs. "You landed just outside of the city. Chiyoh was the one to find you and bring you back here. But I watched you fall." Hannibal keeps his eyes on the bay window. Will can't strain his neck enough to see the fallen's face, but he can only imagine the look etched on to it.

"He made a spectacle of it," Hannibal continues. "And you weren't the only one. I imagine there will be news reports on it."

Will frowns. There hasn't been a mass-falling like this in centuries. The last one he knew about was back in 1812, where humans looked up to the night's sky and observed a shower of light streaming across an ink black sky. There was hysteria afterwards. Many people didn't understand what they saw. Some called it a comet shower: giving a slight opportunity for religious leads to step in and declare that the comets were a message to humanity, declaring that the end of the world was upon them. Newspapers ran with those stories, and it grew out of control. But within a year, everyone had forgotten about it when time merely ticked on, and the apparent End of the World didn't happen.

Those fallen never surfaced. Will looked for them in cities and villages and every settlement in between, but never found them. He frowns. Maybe those are the *unaccounted for* fallen Michael wants found so badly.

If the hysteria of 1812 was anything to go by, Will can only imagine how news stations today will take it. He assumes that pictures and videos of the fall are now swarming social media, and that even though he fell not twelve hours ago, stories are starting to be pumped out by stations and publishers alike.

Hannibal shifts in his seat, looking over to Will's outstretched body. His gaze finds itself landing on his back. "I'm torn between letting you heal adequately and moving from this place." His words are measured.

"My wings let the seraphim find me," Will says slowly, his fingers twitching by his side, "I don't think they kept that in mind when Michael tossed me out."

Hannibal nods. He must know that, then. "We'll need to move before they realise their mistake. I have organised a safe place for us to go to. Chiyoh will be accompanying us there." He stands from his chair and strides over to the side of the bed, kneeling on to one

knee. With a kind of gentleness that Will doesn't see from him that often, he touches the mound of bandages and cloth against Will's back. Another sharp shot of pain wracks through his spine.

Hannibal clicks his tongue. "I can give you more pain relief after I've changed these," he nods to the dressings, "but I'm afraid Chiyoh has the right idea. We must leave now, before any of Michael's soldiers come looking."

Will nods against the pillows. Hannibal takes the small bowl from the bedside table and a couple of flannels before heading towards the ensuite. He returns after a couple of minutes with a bowl of clear water.

Hannibal shuffles some things around on the table: placing the bowl of water close to the side, and dips some pieces of flannel into it. He reaches for the box from last night: the one with the syringe. When he turns to Will's back, it's to carefully lift soaked cloth and bandages away. The sight of once white fabric now soaked through with red catches the corner of Will's eye. Hannibal observes the expanse of Will's back for a quiet moment before turning back to the table. He goes straight for the box, opening it and extracting a needle and syringe.

Will eyes the needle. "Is that a human medicine?" he asks, watching as Hannibal methodically half-fills the syringe from a small, clear glass vial and taps out some trapped air bubbles. He's seen treatment for fallen injuries change over the millennia: from the first purge, where wounds would become infected, festering, and barely stitched together, to later years where the wounds would actually be closed. Albeit with stitching that looks like it belongs on fabric and sewing rather than skin. Not once has he ever seen pain relief administered. He's always concluded that it just doesn't work. Even without their angelic blood coursing through their bodies anymore, he presumes there's some intolerance there preventing it from working.

His answer is in the form of a sideways glance from Hannibal and a pressed pair of lips. "A concoction of my own making," he says slowly, examining the vial against the morning light slipping into the room. Satisfied with the amount, he turns towards Will's back. "Codeine and morphine don't work on our kind. So an alternative must be sought out."

Will winces: *our kind*. The wince only deepens when he can feel the pick of a needle piercing his wounds.

All at once, just like last night, a cool feeling starts to coil around his muscles. It starts in his back and slowly drifts down towards his legs. Some of it ventures towards his neck, but stops just shy of his shoulders. He sees Hannibal reach for his back and feels the pressure of a hand being placed on his back. "It should start working quicker now," Hannibal says. He looks at Will. "Any pain or discomfort when I do this?"

Truthfully, he can't really feel anything. Will shakes his head.

Hannibal nods. Within a couple of minutes, Will's back is completely numb. He can't feel Hannibal cleaning out the wounds on his back. He can't feel Hannibal then pressing dry dressings into the wounds. For the most part, Hannibal works wordlessly. He occasionally glances down at Will's face, checking for discomfort. At a loss of where to look, Will settles

his gaze at the window on the other side of the room. More beams of morning light start streaming in through the opening of the pulled curtains.

He almost misses when Hannibal pulls away from the bedside. “That should do for a couple of hours,” he says, picking up the last clean flannel to wipe at his hands. Will tries not to wince at the streaks of crimson blood that mar them. “I’ll bring medical supplies when we get travelling. We’ll change these dressings against when we get settled somewhere else.”

“And you have that organised, do you?” Will asks.

Hannibal sets his jaw, but nods.

There’s a car parked against the pavement just outside Hannibal’s home. Bundled in a thick scarf and long coat, and wobbling on legs like a newborn colt, Will steps out of Hannibal’s house. He glances around. Everything seems a bit too bright and he doesn’t know if it’s because of the medicine leaving his body or the fact that he’s slowly losing his angelic powers. His body will have to adjust into becoming something else: not exactly human, but not angel either...somewhere caught in between.

Chiyoh watches him stumble down the steps of Hannibal’s house and starts his walk towards her. Her face is just as unreadable as usual. “You look like shit,” is the first thing she says when he reaches the car. She leans against it casually, arms folded tightly over her chest. She’s equally as shielded from the cold nipping air of the outside.

Will just nods. “I feel like shit,” he replies before reaching for the handle of the car door. He falls into the backseat, wincing at the abrupt movement. His wince turns into a grimace and gasp when he sits back against the leather seat, the wounds on his back protesting viciously. He gets a sideways glance from Chiyoh, who merely watches him out of the corner of her eye from outside the car. She steps away from it, and joins him by the open door. “You’ll get used to it,” she says, before shutting the door.

He lets his head tilt back against the firm headrest, and allows himself to breathe for a moment. He can feel it already: the adjustment. If he had a scientific mind, he would simply conclude that the cells in his body, his very DNA, is now morphing and shifting into something new. A metamorphosis. His mind is taken back to the few medical school lectures he attended under the guise of a student. Some of them, particularly in the last few years, explored what was being called the Fallen Phenomena. They would examine the process currently uncoiling within Will’s own body as he thinks. His memory turns sour. Those very same lecturers who would allow such questions to be asked, and not scoff them away, often times ended up mysteriously placed on extended leave within a couple of days.

He’s pulled out of his memories by the car shifting. Hannibal sits into the passenger side of the car, turning to look at Will from over his shoulder. “You should rest,” is all Hannibal says before turning back to face the street. Outside the car, he watches as Chiyoh stacks the last of some duffle bags into the trunk. With everything put away, she glances up and down the street for a moment, before rounding the car to get into the driver’s seat. She barely acknowledges the two of them before starting the engine. Within seconds, the car pulls away from the house.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

They've been in the car for a couple of hours now. Will spends most of it asleep, head pillowed against a jacket he's bunched up and wedged against the window. When he's awake, he just watches scenery pass: cityscapes blur as they drive straight through, and fields and fields of ploughed and sewed land sprawl out for miles in between. Occasionally, he glances towards the front of the car. Chiyoh and Hannibal sit in silence, keeping their eyes on the road ahead. He once drifted between sleep and wakefulness, only to hear a soft murmured conversation between the two of them. *I'll have to change his dressings soon and see to his wounds,* Hannibal said quietly. Will heard a shifting of weight in the front seat, and presumed that Hannibal had just turned to look back at him. Will kept his eyes shut.

Chiyoh didn't respond. But Will did feel the car drift from the road and park. The smell of gas seeped into the car, and he could only presume that they had stopped at some run of the mill gas station for a refill. He was moved about in the back of the car, carefully, and his dressings were changed: all the while he made sure to keep his eyes were closed. Sleep tugged at his bones, but he wanted to stay awake, just to see how their journey was going. By the time he opens his eyes, and they stay open, they're driving across a bridge suspended over a stretched out river. There's a sharp glare of sunlight across the water's surface. There's not a single cloud in the sky to offer relief. Will blinks the last of sleep away.

His joints take a moment to loosen as he straightens in his seat. Muscles strain as he stretches his legs out underneath the driver's seat. Chiyoh glances up at the rear view mirror: catching his gaze. Hannibal seems to notice Will's wakefulness too. He offers Will a small smile – nothing more than the upturn of the corner of his mouth – before returning to watch the traffic of the bridge.

Once off of the bridge, the road they're on is suddenly surrounded by rich and dense forest. Tall towering trees frame each side of the road, dwarfing the car. Will looks up. The evening light streams through some gaps in the canopy, lighting the forest floor.

Everything around them seems so peaceful.

"Where are we going?" are the first words to leave Will's throat – scratchy and hoarse from being unused.

Hannibal turns his head slightly. "I have a property that has been hidden away in Virginia for a couple of years. I thought that we could stay there for now as Michael may very well be searching for us now."

Will hums. He glances over to Chiyoh. "And will you be staying with us?"

She doesn't take her eyes off of the winding road ahead. The only response he gets is a small, but sharp, nod. The rest of the journey is done in silence. It isn't lost on Will that every five

or ten minutes, Hannibal glances out the passenger side window: eyes directed at the sky. Even with his sleep and morphine-addled mind, he can take a guess as to what Hannibal is searching for. But he bites the inside of his cheek and says nothing.

They reach the house before the sun disappears completely. It's a simple-looking two-story farmhouse, hidden away in Wolf Trap, Virginia. Even with it only an hour or so away from Baltimore, he can only assume that Chiyoh insisted on weaving through a long route, just to throw off any suspecting on-lookers. A couple of meters away from the house stands a barn: starting to succumb now to years of underuse. Chiyoh is the first to get out, and goes straight to the trunk of the car. She grabs a rifle – a gun she's had for a couple of years now – and starts stalking towards the empty house.

"A lot has happened while you slept," Hannibal says suddenly. When Will looks at him, he frowns when he sees the other fallen looking straight back at him. "It would seem that Michael has realised his mistake. There were a couple of angels sent to Baltimore. We saw them dotted around the city."

Will shuffles in his seat, straightening. "Have you seen any since?"

Hannibal shakes his head. "I believe Michael thinks you to be too injured to travel far from your landing site. But we can't be too careful."

After a couple of minutes, Chiyoh suddenly appears from the back of the house, rifle still in hand. She strides towards the car, face unreadable. With a simple head shake directed at Hannibal, the other fallen starts unbuckling his seat belt. "I'll get you settled inside and tend to your back first," he says, opening the door and letting in a harsh sharp breeze of cold air. "Then Chiyoh and I will start loading things into the house."

"How long do you suspect to stay here, then?"

Hannibal shrugs a shoulder. "It depends on a couple of factors, unfortunately. But I don't suspect we'll be here for too long."

The corner of Will's mouth turns upwards in a smile. "Famous last words."

Even though the house hasn't been used for a couple of years, it's remarkably clean. The amenities and appliances still work. The water from the taps is clear and drinkable, and within a couple of minutes since loading the last of their supplies into the house, Will hears the rumbling of pipes, signalling that the heating is starting to turn on. Will was shepherded into one of the three bedrooms in the house. Since then, perched on the edge of the made bed, he's been gently rolling and flexing the muscles in his back. Even with the morphine-concoction starting to wear off, his wounds don't hurt as bad as they did. He can adequately

raise his arms up and move them around. Bending and leaning over doesn't seem to be a problem, but does take him a while to right himself after. The one thing that he winces at is the sharp sting and pull of stitches in his wounds. He suspects that once Hannibal returns to him, that they'll be removed and his back inspected once more.

There's a squeak of a floorboard signalling Hannibal's return. When the other fallen stands in the portal of the door, he's armed with a small pair of scissors, the box of pain medication, and a bowl with flannel cloths. All of this seems so routine to Will now. Without any prompting, he slowly stands up and sheds his loose-fitting tee, hiding a small wince at how his back protests the movement. He rounds one side of the queen-sized bed, and wordlessly lowers himself belly-down on to the crisp sheets. His ears twitch at the sound of Hannibal's footfalls on the wood flooring of the room. He still hasn't seen the wounds for himself. Quite frankly, he doesn't want to. He can only imagine what they look like: he's met too many battered and bloodied fallen during his time in this world.

The bed shifts slightly as Hannibal perches on the edge of it. He sets everything in his hands on the other side of Will's body. "You've been exercising your back?"

It's neither a question nor a statement, but Will nods anyways. He pillows his chin on his crossed arms.

"Is there any pain?"

"A little bit when I stand up." He tries not to grimace at the bandages on his back being peeled back. For a moment, everything's quiet. Hannibal's examining the damage, then. Then there's suddenly a satisfied hum before Hannibal starts dabbing wet flannels on the ridge of both scars. "What does it look like?" Will finds himself asking, looking towards the corner of the room, but not looking at anything in particular.

Hannibal tilts his head. "Even with your powers fading, your healing is coming along quite quickly. I can only presume that your body is taking that bit longer to adapt and change." Hannibal dips the flannel into a small bowl of warm water. "But you will have to be careful from now on, *mylimasis*. You'll soon have de-sanctified blood. An injury to you from now on could be fatal."

Will bites the inside of his cheek. "I know."

Satisfied with the wounds being clean, Hannibal runs an almost surgical finger along the closed ridges of scars. They protrude slightly, but once the stitches are gone, they'll blend back into Will's skin. He detests the idea that Michael would be the one to leave a permanent mark on Will. For that reason alone, he'd run the archangel through his own sword.

Will watches him from the corner of his eye. "When I woke up after falling, and I saw you standing at your bedroom door," he says slowly, "you looked...remorseful."

Hannibal arches a pale eyebrow, but doesn't stop examining Will's back. "Remorseful?"

"Like you were sorry that I lost my wings, that I was sentenced to live down here now for the rest of time." Will tries not to let his breath hitch when Hannibal finally glances at him.

“Even though we knew what we were doing. Even though you knew that Michael would be furious and take my wings. You still looked...I don’t know. You looked so affected by it.”

Hannibal straightens. “Of course I would be affected by it, my love.” He flattens a hand against the skin of Will’s lower back. “I knew exactly what would happen, but to see it for myself – to see how brutal Michael had been with you – it turned my stomach.”

It takes some effort, but Will manages to move one of his arms to reach down along the bed, hand searching for Hannibal’s. When he finds it, he interlinks their fingers together on the cotton sheets of the bed. Warmth from Hannibal’s skin seeps into his. Will looks at their hands. “Can I sleep in your bed tonight?”

“I think it best that you sleep here alone, Will,” Hannibal sighs, but tightens his fingers around Will’s, “your wounds need to heal. If you need me during the night, I’m just down the hall. Chiyoh’s room is across from mine.”

Will can’t help but snort. “You know as well as I do that Chiyoh wouldn’t come to my aid if I was set upon by a pack of hellhounds.”

Hannibal fails to hide a small smile. “She has done a lot for you, my love: don’t deny her that. She shows her love for people in different ways.” His thumb rubs gently over Will’s. “If it makes you feel more comfortable, I can leave the doors ajar?”

“I’d feel more comfortable sleeping next to you,” Will mumbles against the pillow casing, but doesn’t say anything else about it when Hannibal sighs through his nose.

“We can start physiotherapy for your back tomorrow if the wounds have adequately healed over,” Hannibal says, looking at Will’s back once more. “I’d like to leave them uncovered for tonight. Just to let the skin around the stitches breathe.” The slightly chilly air of the bedroom is welcomed against Will’s back.

Hannibal then stands up from the bed. “If you’re feeling up to some food, I should be able to whisk up a small dinner?”

At the mention of a meal, Will’s stomach grumbles. It’s an answer Hannibal seems happy to take, as he smiles and leaves the room.

By the time Will’s sleep-addled mind makes sense of what’s happening, it’s too late. He feels the tell-tale feeling of a blade’s tip being pressed into the middle of his exposed back before he can even open his eyes.

“Get up.”

The gruff voice of the Angel of the Eastern Gate is almost deafening in the silence of the bedroom. Will slowly opens his eyes. They take a moment to adjust to the darkness of the room, but there, only a couple of feet away, stands the familiar daunting figure of the Angel of the Eastern Gate, with a scowl etched firmly into his face.

Will regards him for a moment, managing to regulate his breathing. “Can you give me a minute? My back is still a bit sore-”

The tip of the Angel’s sword leaves his back and suddenly there’s a strong hand at Will’s shoulder, turning him sharply. The momentum sends him tumbling off of the bed and on to the ground. The suddenly movement makes his back screech in pain, but he clenches his jaw shut.

Suddenly the pointed end of the Angel’s sword is in front of his face. The gleaming metal catches the white moonlight spilling into the room. Will can just about make out the inscription along the length of the blade. “Get up, *fallen*,” the Angel snarls.

Will manages to catch the side of the bed with one hand, and the edge of the bedside table with his other. Using his legs, he pushes himself upright: desperately trying to mask the pain coursing through his body. Once up, he’s pushed towards the opened door of the bedroom. “Move.” The Angel’s large hand stays gripped to his shoulder, pushing him through the darkness. When they reach the stairs, his ears prick. Voices carry themselves up the staircase: disembodied, firm and strident things that Will can’t quite make out.

With the two knitted, healing scars on his back pulsing with hot pain, and a tip of an *adamas* sword at his back, Will carefully makes his way down each step of the staircase. His grip on the railing it tight and white-knuckled. The Angel behind him shoves at him when they near the end. “*Move*.” Even stumbling down the last few steps of the stairs, Will’s legs manage to keep him upright as they stand in the dark hallway. The voices are clearer now.

“*How long have you been poisoning his mind, fallen*?”

“*I’ve done nothing to influence his actions, brother*.”

Will swallows a thick lump lodging itself into his throat. One of those voices is recognises instantly. Hannibal. Will’s mind flickers back to the two open bedroom doors from upstairs. Of course whoever else is here would have grabbed Hannibal too. The other takes him a moment to identity – only because he hasn’t heard it’s speaker speak in almost a century.

Gabriel, he thinks coldly, *why is **Gabriel** here?*

No sooner has he been shoved into the open-planned living room does he feel the blood in his veins freeze. Six immaculately dressed figures fill up most of the living room. The thick white plumages of their wings seem to occupy the spaces between them. Will quickly glances around: it’s just them. He can still hear rhythmic beating of wings against the air outside. Sentries must be outside then.

The Angel behind him abruptly shoves at his shoulder, sending him stumbling further into the living room. His legs are too weak to support the movement, so he is sent tumbling on to his

knees. The shock of pain ricochets up through his body. He barely has a chance to push himself up when strong fingers wrap tightly around the curls his hair, jerking his head upwards. "You believed that you could hide from me, could you?" The all-too-familiar voice of Michael hisses in his ear.

Will grimaces: whether it's at the pain of his hair being pulled or the feeling of Michael's hot breath ghosting his ear, he isn't too sure. But he manages to keep his eyes open. He holds Hannibal's cool and expressionless gaze.

"*I'm sorry that I didn't do it sooner*." Michael casts a debilitating glare over to Hannibal. "That is what your whore told me when he was to repent before the consulate."

A deafeningly quiet moment falls on to the room for a moment. The corner of Hannibal's mouth then quirks into a smirk.

It's enough to send Michael into a rage. Will can feel the raw roaring fire erupt from the archangel as he merely glances over to Uriel. The archangel looms over Hannibal's kneeling frame. With a simple step forward, the archangel reaches out to yank Hannibal's head backwards. Before Will can even protest, the edge of a sharpened adamas blade rests just below Hannibal's jugular. Uriel's eyes glow a chilling white. Will tries not to reach out. One word – one nod or *blink* – from Michael and Hannibal will be executed.

He'll be executed anyways, his mind whispers, *you both will.*

"I should have just struck you down in the consulate," Michael's voice grows quiet. Will can feel the archangel turn his mouth towards Will's ear – like fledglings whispering secrets to each other. It doesn't matter. The other six archangels around the room all know what's going on. By the small flicker of anger that shadows Hannibal's face for a moment, he must know too.

Will tries not to wince when Michael's voice is the only thing filling his mind. "While the thought of splattering your blood across the consulate floor crossed my mind, I knew I needed to find that creature too." Will doesn't remove his gaze from Hannibal's. "I knew that if I threw you back to where you had been found, he may have sought you out."

"You took your time," Will grits. "We managed to get out of the state."

"I was otherwise preoccupied," Michael almost-drawls, tightening his fingers around Will's curls. "Your banishment caused quite a ruckus, you know. I'm sure you remember the siblings that pleaded with us for your wings to be spared. Even after you had been cast out, I was left with an uprising on my hands."

The archangels in the room don't even react. Their faces are as impassive as always.

"Realise that you were the one to cause their fall," Michael continues, "and their annihilation. Father's creations may have been accepting of castaways in eons past, but not anymore. Gabriel has been watching, you see. Father's creatures have been doing the extermination work for us. Why, Barachiel and I haven't even lifted a finger since getting here."

Will looses a slow breath. “For being our greatest soldier, big brother, you seem remarkably unconcerned that the humans seem to be killing our kind.”

“*Our kind?!* What concern are they to me, *fallen*?” Michael hisses. “Those with de-sanctified blood are no longer my concern.”

The blade pressed to Hannibal’s throat catches a stray strand of moonlight that streams in through a window. The light seems to catch Michael’s eye. He turns his head slightly, but keeps his mouth at Will’s ear. “I didn’t want to believe that one of my own Watchers would be capable of betraying me: especially one who has served me for as long as you have.” Will’s gaze moves between the blade on Hannibal’s neck and the fallen’s eyes. Even with such a passive expression on his face, Will can tell what the other is trying to tell him: *look at me – keep your eyes on* ***me***.

“Know this, fallen,” Michael turns to keep his mouth close to Will’s ear, “I’ll never see a betrayal arise like that ever again.”

Before Will can even loose a retort, Uriel’s blade at Hannibal’s neck is dragged slowly across. A torrent of dark blood, almost black from the moonlight outside, gushes down Hannibal’s front: pooling at his knees. Uriel keeps his white, shining eyes locked on Will. Something pulls at his bones. Will lurches forward, trying to clear the room to reach Hannibal’s slumping body: but the tightening fingers through his hair keep him in place. The sound of Hannibal’s body hitting the wooden floor makes too loud of a thump in the otherwise quiet room. Will’s ears quickly fill up with the deafening sound of blood rushing. Everything seems so distorted now.

He barely registers the ice-cold feeling of a blade being pressed beneath his Adam’s apple.

Consciousness yanks him to the present before Michael can even do the slightest bit of damage.

He raises his head from his pillow and glances around. Shadows slink back to the darker corners of the room. Bright white moonlight streams in through the uncovered window, highlighting a wardrobe on the other side of the room, a pair of dressers, the quilts kicked to the end of Will’s bed: normal things. Even with the sound of blood rushing through his ears, he strains to listen for any sounds within the house. There’s a squeak and crack from the structure around him: sounds old houses make when they contract during cold weather. But he doesn’t hear anything else. No wings beating and flapping against the wind. No stray footsteps in the hallway outside.

His back protests the movement, but once Will is sitting at the edge of the bed, the pain subsides. His fingers tighten around the muscle of his thighs. It’s surprising that his heart

hasn't leapt out of his throat, or burst through his ribcage. It jackhammers itself inside of him. His breath comes and goes just as quickly.

With one last glance around the room, and one last quiet moment to listen out for any disturbances, Will pushes himself upright. His legs wobble for a moment, but after a moment, he pads down the hallway, hand flat against the wall. It guides him through the darkness until he reaches the slightly opened door of Hannibal's room. With a quick peer inside, he isn't at all surprised to see Hannibal sitting up and looking back at him.

"What is it?" his voice is nothing but a mumble – mindful of the quietness that has fallen over the house.

"-Can I sleep here?" Will almost winces at how weak and cracked his voice sounds. "Please."

The first time he ever slept in the same bed as Hannibal, it had been when Hannibal occupied a Roman imperial *villa urbana* near the Bay of Naples during the height of the empire. Why Will had found himself in Naples, so far removed from the capital, he wasn't entirely sure. Maybe it had been when cracks started to form in his belief that what he was doing on behalf of the archangels was right. The creatures that he had been finding for years on end by this point were weakened things: mere shadows of the awesome and dazzling creatures they had been among the clouds.

Truthfully, Will thinks that it must have been the first time where he expressed his fears out loud. He distantly remembers Hannibal mulling over his words as the villa fell quiet for the night. Having been escorted by Hannibal to the *triclinium*, they had been served small, but lavish, meals by a couple of house slaves that stayed awake serving until the early hours of the morning. One of them had caught Will's ever-vigilant eye. He couldn't mistake the body type of one particular slave. The lithe figure wore a simple tunic that ended just at his knee. The slave had been present since Will had stepped inside the *atrium* of the villa, and had been the one to fetch Hannibal. But since then, the slave had shadowed them: and presented his face and front towards Will.

It wasn't until he had knocked against another serving girl and stumbled slightly that Will had spotted what told him all he needed to know: two long lines of speckled blood along the back of the tunic. The figure froze.

Hannibal had noticed Will's attention on the slave. With a simple wave of his hand, the fallen bowed his head slightly at Hannibal and slinked away, keeping his dulled eyes focused intently on the mosaic ground as he fled towards the *pars rustica* with the rest of the house slaves.

Will had merely glanced over to Hannibal. Hannibal knew what Will's job was. And now, as he pads through the darkened hallway of their current residence, does he consider the fact that maybe Hannibal wanted to see what Will would do.

Would he have left Hannibal's table and sought the creature out?

Would he have just forgotten about it and continued in their conversation?

Would Will have been the one to drag Hannibal to Limbo for harbouring a fallen?

It was later that night when Will had found himself in Hannibal's bed. They had been living on this plain for so long, he can't exactly remember when the first time he ever slept with or beside the other was. He just remembers that in that particular instance, his mind had been worried. And Hannibal offered a safe place for him to stay.

That's why when the Hannibal in front of him now nods, moves the quilts and duvet from the other side of the bed, and gestures for Will to slide in, he almost sobs. Weak and wobbling legs carry him towards Hannibal's bed. Once perched on the edge of it, it takes him a moment to comfortably slide beneath the covers and arrange himself into a position where he can be close and touching Hannibal, but his back is undisturbed. He settled for lying on his stomach, half of his body splayed over Hannibal's side, and his head pillowed against the other fallen's shoulder.

"A night terror?" Hannibal asks – even if he doesn't need to. He knows already. Will nods anyway, turning his head to bury his nose into the juncture of Hannibal's neck and shoulder.

"Michael had found us. The rest of the consul was here too. Uriel killed you in front of me." The words are lost against Hannibal's skin. But with them out, he can feel the sharp hot sting of tears starting to prick at the back of his eyes. "It seemed real," he whispers. *Would Gabriel be listening into them?* "It seemed like they were actually here. He said things to me that..."

Hannibal sighs through his nose. For a moment, he seems to collect himself before speaking. "I'm not sure of the full extent of the messenger's powers," he mulls, "but I know that Gabriel has larks and doves everywhere."

Will glances up at Hannibal's unreadable face. A single terrifying thought rears its head. "Has Gabriel found us?"

At that, Hannibal shakes his head. "No. Without wings, without angelic blood flowing in our veins, no seraphim or archangel would be able to find us through those methods. He must be broadcasting, then."

Will's eyelids droop closed when he feels the tips of Hannibal's fingers lightly graze along his bare shoulder.

"I've only seen him broadcasting once before," Hannibal continues, turning slightly to nuzzle against the top of Will's head. "You still have traces of blood in your veins: not enough for you to be traceable, but enough for Gabriel's words to reach you nonetheless. With how quickly your body is purging your blood, however, his words would only be whispers, but they must have combined with your own worries."

Will feels Hannibal shift slightly beneath him: adjusting their positioning ever so slightly. "What did Michael tell you in your nightmare?"

"He said that I was responsible for the others falling," Will says. The words almost lodge themselves in his throat. "He said that he would never see a betrayal like it ever again."

“Your actions were your own, darling. What your siblings did to warrant their own destruction does not, and should not, concern you.” The fingers Hannibal has skimming Will’s shoulders trail down towards the points of Will’s scars. Will almost flinches from the touch. There’s no screeching pain that comes. Instead, there’s only a warmth that seeps through his body.

“Rest now, my love.” Hannibal presses his lips to Will’s temple.

Chapter End Notes

Applause for valium-sedated me for remembering to post this.

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"Why did Michael want me to kill you?"

Hannibal looks up from the chopping board laden with hardy, winter vegetables. A simple soup would be enough to fill their hunger for now, but as Will feels his body acclimatising to being mortal-like, his stomach feels like a bottomless pit. He's taken to watching Hannibal work in the kitchen. The small trips Hannibal sends him on to retrieve "forgotten" ingredients from the pantry or cupboard are feeble excuses made to exercise Will's legs and his back. The promised physiotherapy hasn't started yet, but Will's sure that this is one of the sneakier ways Hannibal is monitoring his ability to walk and reach and stretch. Will hands over the cumin he was sent to gather from the shelf.

"Why did Michael want me to kill you?" he repeats. He leans against the edge of the worktop: slightly thankful that his joints can get some rest. "You never answered me when we were in Baltimore."

Without Chiyoh in the house, it's deathly quiet when neither of them speaks to each other. Will knows that she's just on one of her regular patrols of the house's exterior: a pair of watchful eyes hidden among the low hanging tree branches of the nearby forest.

Will folds his arms over his chest. "Be truthful with me."

"I can only imagine that him knowing that a fallen from the first purge still existing within the world would be a hit to his ego." Hannibal regards Will for a moment before resuming his chopping. "Not that you weren't exceptionally thorough with your searches, my love."

Will tilts his head – unsure if that was a compliment or a jab. "So Michael wanted you killed because, what? You managed to evade being caught for so long?" It sounds likely. No matter how many fallen Will had sent into the next world, Michael was never truly satisfied. Will was never allowed home: even when Limbo seemed to be bursting at the seams with fallen.

"You told me that you probably did something to piss him off," Will says, glancing at the collection of chopped carrots, parsnips and celery lain out in front of Hannibal. On a smaller, separate chopping board, sits a crusty and golden loaf of bread Hannibal had baked earlier that day. For a lack of anything else to do, other than try and hound Hannibal for information, Will plucks up a serrated knife and starts cutting thick slices.

A faint smile appears on Hannibal's face. "My very existence in this world would be enough to *piss him off*, as you would say." Finished with the last of the vegetables, Hannibal slides them from his chopping board into a large pot that had been preheating. The sizzle of the vegetables against the oil is enough to make sure the room doesn't fall into another deafening silence.

It’s shattered entirely when, after a moment, Hannibal says: “there were others.”

Will pauses. “What?”

“There are some who have been here for as long as I have,” Hannibal continues. “There were many purges after the first. Michael had believed for many eons that I was the only one to stay hidden from the very first.”

With the bread forgotten about, Will turns to face the other fallen. “Do...do you know who they are?”

“I do.”

There’s a pregnant pause between them. Will blinks. “Do you want to tell me who they are?” he asks slowly.

Hannibal doesn’t look up from the pot he’s tending to. “They’re not too dissimilar to us. They have been living under changing identities for eons. I know who they are, but they may very well be going under new identities now since the latest purge.” Seemingly content to let the soup simmer for now, Hannibal glances over to Will. “Michael’s wrath is a dangerous thing, you realise.”

“I don’t need you protecting me. What I need is honesty,” Will says, stacking several slices of bread on to a plate. Even slicing bread is tolling, Will notices, as once he has the knife set down, the muscles along his spine seize up. It’s a feeling that almost sends him crumpling to the floor.

A pair of strong arms prevents him from buckling. Will sighs at the feeling of the other’s presence just behind him. With hardly any effort at all, Hannibal helps him upright again. The pain persists: protesting that his muscles are being worked too much. “Would you like some pain relief?”

He woke up earlier with Hannibal inspecting his back. Before he could even draw a dosage into the syringe, Will reached out and caught Hannibal’s wrist. “I don’t need it.” *Why the fuck did you say that, idiot*, he now thought, as the idea of having a special, elevated version of morphine flowing through his veins suddenly reared its head. “Do you have much of it left?”

“I can always acquire more,” Hannibal reassures. The words are accompanied by a soft brush of Hannibal’s nose against the shell of Will’s ear. For a terrifying, panicking instant, he’s transported back into the living room, engulfed in moonlight. He sees a dark pool of blood lapping at his shoes. But he blinks it away. He knows that this is Hannibal. He can tell the difference between how the two of them hold themselves, how their body heat radiates.

Will tilts his head to the side, pressing his temple to Hannibal’s forehead. “I’d really like some pain relief now, please.”

Hannibal tries to hide a smirk as he guides Will from the kitchen to the living room. Even though he pauses slightly at the portal of the door, expecting seven expressionless but foreboding archangels to be stood around the room, Will lets Hannibal deposit him on a worn

and comfortable armchair. There's a small cushion that he arranges slightly to sit against his lower back, supporting it slightly.

"How many of these *others* have you met?" Will asks.

It takes Hannibal a moment to compose an answer. "It's difficult to say," he says, turning from the other to walk over to a nearby wooden cabinet. He rifles inside one of the drawers for a moment before he pulls out the familiar box of vials. "I knew one in particular. He fell a couple of decades after my own banishment. I have vague recollections of finding him among a herder's cattle in Mesopotamia."

A large, sprawling expanse of land. That's where Will would find a lot of freshly banished fallen still recovering from their ordeal. The first purge was a remarkably local affair. Unlike the ones that followed soon after.

Hannibal pierces one of the last remaining vials with the needle of the syringe, and holds it up to the light to draw an accurate dosage. "I lost contact with him: as I did with many others."

A warm hand lands on Will's sleeve-covered forearm. "To save excessive strain on your core, I think this dose should be administered into your arm. Is that alright, Will?"

"Just give it to me," Will replies to the ceiling, letting his eyelids flutter closed when his sleeve if rolled up to his elbow and a needle pricks his skin. Almost immediately he can feel cooling sensation of the painkiller flowing up through his arm, seeking and searching. Will breathes out a long exhale.

"I'll have to start weaning you off of this," Hannibal says coolly, retracting the needle once finished, "I don't want you developing an addiction."

"Hmm." By the time Hannibal has everything packed away again, the pain in Will's back is nothing more than a dull throb. It takes a considerable effort to lift his head from the back of the couch and let it hang forward. He watches with hooded eyes as Hannibal puts the box away and mills around the sparsely furnished living room. As his muscles soothe and ease and relax with the drugs coursing through him, he's vaguely aware of Hannibal returning to the kitchen to check on lunch.

Will's head rolls to the side. Snow fell during the night. A light dusting of it covers the land surrounding the house. Even the evergreen trees of the forest nearby have been sprinkled with white. A flock of birds suddenly taking flight dislodges snow. It cascades down several branches until it lands on the ground. It's all so...peaceful: as if there weren't scores of eyes seeking him out. As if Michael hasn't sent a swarm of soldiers to sweep the streets of Baltimore and the surrounding neighbourhoods and towns. But here, over an hour away, hidden by trees and sprawling fields of farmland, he doesn't worry about those seeking eyes.

His eyelids grow heavy. Sleep pulls at his body and mind, easing him down into shadows. He can still ear Hannibal moving around in the kitchen next door: the clinking of pots and pans, footsteps against the wooden floorboards. Outside, there are birds cawing and singing.

Then, there's nothing.

He stands amid darkness. A vacant and empty void surrounds him. Within the darkness, he hears the rhythmic movement of air. The noise gets louder and louder until the beating of air deafens his ears.

"*I know you can still hear me, creature*."

Gabriel.

He tries not to flinch away from the voice hissing in his ear. Will schools his breathing, keeping it steady.

Will opens his mouth to speak, to retort, to tell the messenger prodding into his dreams at night to *fuck off*, but nothing comes out. The void around him robs his voice.

"*Gifted a noble job by Michael himself, and you threw it back in his face. What kind of depraved demon has he turned you into?*"

Gabriel's voice whirls around him. Whispers join him: the hisses and growls of his larks. The pounding of wind – wings, he realises, they're wings – only grows louder against his ears. He wishes for the last of his blood to change. Once it's turned, this will be the last time he'll have Gabriel's insistent voice crowing in his ear.

Will frowns. Gabriel's words...

"*You were ordered to kill him,"* Gabriel crows, *"now their blood is on your hands too, creature."*

He shakes his head. He knows it's the drugs Hannibal gave him sent him into this sleep. Gabriel can only speak to him while he's under. But with nothing but a void surrounding him, he has nothing to claw at. He can't climb back to consciousness.

But there's something in the back of his mind. What Gabriel is saying...He forces himself to listen.

"*Michael will smite you both for this. Barachiel will be disappointed. He once made a case in defence of you. Our favourite little Watcher: the one who couldn't be turned."*

Gusts of cold wind coil around him.

"*I imagine Raphael will try and heal you*," Gabriel purrs – his voice a warmth against Will's ear. A chill runs down his spine. Pain groans in his back. *"What do you think of that, creature? Would you like to return home?"*

More voices join Gabriel's. Harsh hissing whispers surround every word that the archangel speaks.

"You spent so long in their world, meeting with him through the eons. Not ***once*** *did you follow your duty and put an end to him."*

I know what you're doing, Will tries to think to himself. His own voice, cradled within his own mind, is soon chased away by Gabriel's words.

"*Answer me this: Did you keep a vigilant watch on him? Was he always in your sights? Or did you think him harmless and cast your gaze elsewhere?*"

Will shakes his head. Gabriel's voice has burrowed into his ear like a scuttling bug. His insistent hissing and crowing is in his very brain. He tries to raise his hands, to scratch at his head and rid himself of Gabriel's words.

His arms are locked to his side.

Then all at once, when it seems like the noise has finally crested, it all vanishes. All that remains is a gaunt quiet. Behind him, in the dark void, he feels a form looming over his shoulder.

A single, strong voice wisps along his ear.

"*Ask him about Francis Dolarhyde*."

"Will?"

Two firm hands keep him sitting back against the chair as he is suddenly thrown to the surface of consciousness. Chiyoh tilts her head slightly. "Are you alright?"

The hearty smell of vegetable soup and warm bread floats into the living room. Streams of light still continue to crawl over the floor, reaching for the other side of the room. Not much time must have passed, then, he thinks. He rubs at his eyes. "I'm fine," he says.

Chiyoh doesn't move. "You dreamt," she says lowly. The kitchen's next door. He's mildly surprised that Hannibal wasn't the one to come and check on him. By Chiyoh's side is her rifle. She must be finished with her routine check of the land.

Will runs his fingers through his hair. "It's nothing," he insists, grabbing on to the arms of the chair with a tight grip. "I'm fine." He tries to lift himself from the chair. With the combination of drugs still lingering in his veins and his joints becoming locked from sitting down too long, he begrudgingly accepts the firm arm Chiyoh wraps around his lower back. Once he's up and steady on his feet, she lets go. She does escort him into the kitchen. There's a small round, wooden table to one side of the kitchen, with four chairs around it. Hannibal sets the last bowl of soup down when they sit down. The bread that Will had sliced is piled neatly on to a plate in the middle of the table. Chiyoh reaches for two and sets into eating.

Will sits silently, mixing a small swirl of milk into the soup. Hannibal watches him bring the spoon to his lips. "How are you feeling, Will?"

Ask him about Francis Dolarhyde.

"My back is sore, but other than that, I'm okay," he answers, before beginning to devour his lunch.

Gabriel doesn't whisper to him that night.

Or the night after.

Will lies on his side when the third night rolls in, facing Hannibal's sleeping form, awaiting Gabriel's voice to leer at him. It doesn't come. For the past three days, as he's slowly weaned from the pain medication and his stitches are removed, he can't help but mull over Gabriel's words.

Hannibal told him that the archangel broadcasts. He's experienced it before. Sometimes, every angel will receive the same message. That's what he experienced. It was when the second round of purging started. It was in a time when humans started to be less accepting of fallen landing on their territory. Gabriel had spoken to those with blessed blood still within them: *Let Father's pets do what they need to do. Do* ***not*** *interfere.*

Other times, he was told, Gabriel can send one particular message to one particular angel. He must be clinging on to the fact that Will's body is still purging the last of his blessed blood, then.

It's the name that sticks out the most. He's never heard of it before. Francis Dolarhyde. During his stay on earth, over the many eons, he's never made a point of remembering fallen names. They lose their angelic titles once they land. Most of them, reeling with shock, won't even remember what they used to be called anyway. When a daughter of man usually finds them, they'll adopt a new name. If they choose to wander the plain for centuries, just as Will and Hannibal and Chiyoh have done, they'll adopt new monikers every couple of years or so.

When you're trying to hide from the wandering gaze of humans, it *is* noticeable when they wither and grey with age, and you haven't changed at all.

Hannibal shifts slightly, a soft breath leaving his nose. The moon outside is perched high in the sky, glistening over the tops of nearby trees. The calmness has returned to this place. Will's hand twitches from its place on his pillow. He wants to reach out and graze his fingertips along Hannibal's cheek: curl up against Hannibal's side, find warmth and comfort and ease in being held.

But his mind is plagued.

It's what Gabriel does best. He whispers into your ear and lets doubt and uncertainty burrow deep into your mind, until anxiety festers like an infected wound.

His now-turning body, however, *does* need sleep. He's eventually pulled under when the moon starts to descend, making way for the morning sun. Even though he sleeps, he's still

aware of his surroundings.

He's aware of Hannibal waking.

He can feel the other turn slightly to glance over to Will.

There's a small moment of quiet before the blankets surrounding them shift.

Sleep is almost chased away when Will distantly feels a warm touch on the side of his face. With his palm against Will's cheek, Hannibal's thumb gently rubs along his cheekbone. The other's breathing is slow and measured. Will wants to surface completely. Falling into a bed with Hannibal and spending the night is nothing new. But he can count on one hand the number of times he had woken with the other: when they had taken time in the morning to simply just lay with each other. Something always had to be done. Hannibal was always either whisked away by someone or he found something to entertain himself. Will's searches were the thing to drag him away in the morning. Even when he decided that he didn't want to do it anymore, whatever coursed through his blood compelled him to follow orders.

Michael's invisible, but ever-looming, presence always spurred him into action.

When Hannibal speaks, it's soft, but enough to break the silence of the room. "Did Gabriel keep you awake?"

That makes Will's eyes open. Hannibal's impassive, expressionless face greets him when Will surfaces. "Gabriel didn't speak to me last night," he replies slowly. Unconsciously, he nuzzles into the touch at the side of his face.

Hannibal's expression doesn't change.

"He spoke to you a couple of days ago." It isn't a question. But Will nods regardless. Hannibal's lips draw into a thin line. "What did he say?"

Ask him about Francis Dolarhyde. "Nothing remarkable," Will answers. He reaches out to brush some of Hannibal's fringe from his forehead.

Hannibal's hand moves. It winds around to the back of his head. Long fingers twirl around Will's curls. "You said that you didn't need my protection, but honesty from me, Will," Hannibal says, bringing his hand back to Will's cheek. The back of his index finger runs gently along his cheekbone. "I require the same from you."

Will breathes for a moment. The birds start their chorus outside. Another light layer of snow fell during the night.

"He...he spoke to me. Directly. Like when Michael appeared in my dream a couple of nights ago. It's like they were here, looming over me."

Hannibal slowly nods. Will can only distantly imagine that after Hannibal's fall, he must have experienced something similar, but more terrible. One of the first to be chastised and berated by Michael and the consul. One of the first left to wander and figure out the world for

themselves. All the while trying to learn what was real and what were only vicious whispers trying to taunt.

Will swallows. “He said...I don’t know, he chastised me. He said that I was ungrateful for throwing my job back in their faces. He said that I was responsible for my siblings’ rebellion and their fall. He said I have their blood on my hands.”

Something he says makes Hannibal frown. It’s a slight crease along his brow, but it’s a change from his usual nonchalant expression. “You have their blood on your hands?” he repeats slowly. “Did he tell you what he meant by that?”

Ask him about Francis Dolarhyde.

“He said it was because I hadn’t killed you, like I was ordered to.” Even with all the eons of time behind him, he can still vividly remember that day: the day that started everything. Standing on the Eastern Wall of the Garden, looking out on to the expansive desert: watching it all begin. It wasn’t until later did he learn to find some humour in it: the Fall of Humanity and the Fall of Angels being on the same day. Those now Fallen – their only slight being their disdain of Father’s new favourite pets.

His favourite pets that caused their own demise by eating a damn apple on the suggestion of a snake.

“Will,” Hannibal says, leaning up to support himself on one arm. He keeps a touch on the side of Will’s face. “I need you to remember exactly what Gabriel said to you.”

There’s something in his eyes. Something Will’s never seen in them before. It’s not panic. Hannibal doesn’t panic. But it’s something similar. “I...”

“Will-”

“-He told me to ask you about Francis Dolarhyde.” The name fumbles out from his lips. As soon as it’s spoken, Hannibal changes. His warmth recedes. There’s a terrifying moment where everything is silent. Then Hannibal’s touch disappears from his face. The other flips the blankets from his body and gets out of bed. The chilly air waiting for them outside their nest of blankets doesn’t seem to bother him as Hannibal merely stands and crosses the room to a wardrobe.

“Get up and get dressed.” With Hannibal gone from the bed, a chill starts to nip at Will’s bones. The near-healed wounds on his back protest their abrupt change of temperature.

Hannibal disappears down the hallway. Will hears his footfalls across the wooden floorboards. Hannibal almost jogs down the staircase. It’s then, when he presumably reaches the bottom, that Will can’t listen for him anymore. Tiredness tugs at his bones. It wants to keep him where he is, tucked in bed and resting. But Hannibal’s abrupt order has him slowly easing himself out from beneath their many blankets and throws. Getting dressed is another struggle. His back has healed enough so that pulling on a loose tee and sweater isn’t much trouble. He pulls on his worn jeans with relative ease, but it’s sliding on and tying his boots

that he has trouble with. He can't bend down enough to reach his laces, so he crosses one leg over the other to help.

All the while, there's a slamming of a door echoing up from downstairs.

"-about Dolarhyde."

"Why are you surprised?" Chiyoh argues. "You really thought that they wouldn't notice one of their own turning?"

Will steps into the kitchen. He keeps his hand against the doorframe. Apparently, clothing himself in a rush is what will be his downfall. Chiyoh's boots are damp with a light dusting of snow, tracked in from the outside. Her rifle is slung around her shoulder.

Chiyoh settles him with a harsh look once she notices that he's there. "Gabriel really spoke to you?"

Will looks to Hannibal. Leaning back against the kitchen island with his arms crossed over his chest, the other is looking at the other side of the room, but at nothing in particular. His eyes dart. He's thinking.

"Will-"

"-Yes, alright, *yes*. Gabriel spoke to me."

Chiyoh's eyes narrow. "When?"

"A couple of days ago. When I was asleep on the couch."

It earns an almost-snarl from her. "You didn't think to mention it to me, when I woke you up?"

Will folds his arms. "Gabriel has spoken to me before. He's never said anything interesting or worth remembering."

"But it's different now, Will," she glowers, looking to Hannibal. "So you think that they know about Dolarhyde?"

The other nods, still gazing off to one corner of the kitchen. There's a frown etched into his forehead: one that hasn't left since getting out of bed almost a half hour ago. Will can count on one hand the number of times Hannibal looked this troubled by something.

“Dolarhyde has been loose for more than two centuries,” Chiyoh says, pinching the bridge of her nose between her fingers. “I doubt that the archangels have only just learned of his existence. If they’ve known for a while, why mention it now? It doesn’t make sense.”

“They could be trying to turn you against me,” Will says. The other two beings in the room turn to look at him. It’s been on his mind since hearing Gabriel’s voice. “They must know that you were the one to help me after I fell. This could be their way of trying to break us apart.”

A feral growl leaves Hannibal’s throat. The archangels can be devious, vicious creatures. They’ll chastise their younger siblings and pets for tricks to gain what they want: but the archangels can be so much worse. Being on the receiving end of an archangel’s trickery and goading, Will hates it.

“No.” Chiyoh’s eyes widen slightly. “They’re trying to stop you from ending up like Dolarhyde.”

Hannibal moves. He steps away from the cabinets to the coffee machine. Plucking a cup from the overhead shelves, he lets the grinding of the machine fill the silence that has fallen over the three of them.

Will frowns. “Why would I end up like Dolarhyde?” he asks, then shaking his head. “Who even is he? A fallen?”

Chiyoh sets her rifle down against the leg of the table. She gestures to Hannibal with a gloved hand. “Go on. Explain,” she orders, sitting down on one of the chairs surrounding the table. Hannibal doesn’t turn from the coffee machine. His hands brace themselves on the counter. His fingers tap an insistent rhythm against the surface. “He was an angel,” Hannibal begins. His words are slow. Measured. Even as Will moves into the kitchen, closer to Hannibal’s side, he doesn’t once glance up. “After you, he was the oldest earth-bound angel I had ever met.”

Will cocks his head. “You spoke with him?”

“He spoke with me,” Hannibal amends. “It was 1812. I dismissed myself from duty as a chief medical officer during Napoleon’s effort to seize Russia. As I began to travel back through the rest of the continent, I found myself on a boat to London. The city held my interest for a couple of days, but just as I was about to leave, I was approached by a man.” Hannibal shakes his head. “An angel. He still had his wings: large, dark-maroon coloured things with thick plumage. They were carried with such control and grace, I nearly mistook him for a seraph. It didn’t surprise me that there was an angel there. I had already met you, my love. But what did was how this angel did not pose any threat.”

Then, Hannibal looks up. With the coffee-distraction forgotten about, Hannibal turns to face Will. He takes one of Will’s hands in his. All at once, the warmth from earlier this morning returns to Will’s bones. “We spoke for a number of hours. Eventually, he asked me to view some paintings that were recently being showcased at a gallery within the city. William Blake had recently created a series that the angel was enamoured with.”

Hannibal turns Will's hand in his own. His thumb traces along a long heartline that runs along Will's palm. "I went with him. I didn't see a reason not to. There were four paintings: depicting the Great Red Dragon within the Book of Revelation. Blake, apparently, had been commissioned to create paintings to illustrate books of the Bible. I didn't think much of them. They were beautiful in their own right as paintings, but our kind has a certain attitude towards the stories men crafted surrounding our origin."

Something brief shadows over Hannibal's face. "But this angel, he stood at one of them in particular: *The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed in Sun*. Immovable. He stared at it like it held the meaning of life for him. In a way, I suppose it did."

Chiyoh watches them from the other side of the kitchen. With her chin perched on her closed fist, she glances down at their linked hands. Hannibal sighs. "When we parted, he asked me about life as a fallen. Specifically, he asked me how it felt not to have Gabriel's voice in my head every waking moment. I told him it felt...freeing."

Suddenly, Gabriel's voice is whispering into his own ear. Will feels the presence of the archangel behind him: a foreboding, solid thing that causes a shiver to wrack through his spine. Words from the day before come surging back to him, assaulting his mind and consciousness.

"*Gifted a noble job by Michael himself, and you threw it back in his face. What kind of depraved demon has he turned you into?*"

"*Answer me this: Did you keep a vigilant watch on him? Was he always in your sights? Or did you think him harmless and cast your gaze elsewhere?*"

"Michael wanted me to kill you because...you were turning angels?" Will breathes.

Hannibal shakes his head. "I *suggested* to one that he follow his own voice," he amends. "So technically, I've only changed one."

Chiyoh's snigger is sharp and callous. "And that *one* turned out particularly nasty." She stands and steps closer to Hannibal. "It was like knowingly releasing a rabid dog into a crowded city." She doesn't falter at the light growl Hannibal emits when she glances over to Will.

"Michael seems to think that Hannibal is doing the same to you," she says firmly.

His legs feel weak. It's not the current strain of his back causing the feeling, or his tiredness at the lack of sleep. It's a sudden feeling of...fear. Like they could collapse from beneath him at any moment. An angel *willingly* developing their own consciousness: Will's never heard of such a thing. Michael wouldn't just lose his temper; lashing out at his younger, weaker siblings, casting them out for defying him.

He would start a war.

Neither of them speaks as Hannibal does one last check of Will's back before they turn in to sleep.

Sitting at the edge of the bed, with the other behind him, Will keeps his eyes trained on the other side of the room. Shadows haven't been bothering him. Whether it's because the last of his blood is finally changing, or Hannibal's presence beside him, he isn't sure. But no shadow has slinked into their room during the night for a while. He sucks in a sharp breath when Hannibal presses his fingers into one of his scars. From what he can tell – because he can't contort himself to look at himself in the bathroom mirror – the two wounds are healing well. The mattress shifts as Hannibal gets up. "Everything seems fine," he says. The first words spoken since their gathering in the kitchen. The house had fallen into silence after everything was put out into the open.

Chiyoh left almost four hours ago. She had merely slung her rifle over her shoulder and took the car to go into the next town for some supplies.

Michael's seemingly greatest fear: angels developing free will, a voice of their own, an ability to ignore their commander.

What he doesn't understand is why *he* was spared: why Michael apparently turned a blind eye to *him*. He ignored Michael's command. He decided one day, an age ago, that he didn't want to do his appointed job anymore. And still, he was allowed to wander the earth. He was even approached by the Angel of the Eastern Gate, on behalf of Michael, to do complete one last mission.

Then he could return home. Or he could stay. Whatever he wanted.

As Hannibal moves around the room, grabbing sleeping clothes and readying himself for bed, Will lets his troubled mind wander.

Would Michael really have let him return home? Would he have let him roam the earth unscathed? Would he have retained his wings, or would Michael have taken them regardless?

Was it to show everyone thinking of changing that Michael was the one who had absolute control over them all? Was he just displaying his influence?

Of course, he was.

He's roused from his thoughts when Hannibal hands him a clean, loose-fitting tee and flannel sleep pants. Will takes them with a gracious nod. *Why would Michael send me after you instead of rooting out Dolarhyde*? With a grunt of pain, he manages to change into the tee. His muscles ripple with discomfort along his back. It's eased when he bends slightly: gently stretching the muscles out.

Hannibal kneels by his side. "Do you need help?"

Drawing a measured breath, he shakes his head. "'m fine." The flannel pants pool slightly around his feet when he stands, but he can't bring himself to care. They both wordlessly get into bed, adjusting their nest of throws and blankets until they've settled. Hannibal turns to face the other side of the room. With his bared back facing Will, the other glances over at the expanse of marked and scarred skin. Two obvious lines frame either side of his spine: where his wings used to be. Will's never seen them, but he can only presume they were the same colour as Hannibal's hair, with rich, thick plumage that would have shun against the light.

Will wants to reach for them. The wounds have long since healed over – the scars faintly visible against Hannibal's tanned skin. *I wonder who stitched him back together*, Will thinks, turning to look at the ceiling instead. *Or did he do it himself?*

Sleep almost has him in its grasp when long beams of light streak into the bedroom. It takes his sleep-addled brain a moment to register that the lights belong to a car's headlights. Chiyoh's back. The sound of the front door opening floats upstairs to their room. Will sits up slightly. Chiyoh's footfalls against the wooden floorboards of the living room are loud. Hurried.

"Hannibal!" she calls out. The stairs creak as she runs up.

Will glances over to the other side of the bed only to find Hannibal awake. He sits up, letting the blankets pool at his lap. The door to their shared room is slightly ajar, always kept open just in case of emergencies. Chiyoh pushes it open.

"He's been seen," she breathes, chest heaving with every breath she takes. "Dolarhyde. He's in the area."

Chapter End Notes

My dentist visit went well.

But now I have a cold.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Some revelations are made and Will gets a visitor.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I don't believe that this has been happening for almost two centuries and no one has ever noticed." They gather back in the kitchen, seated around the small, round dining table. Will looks to the other two. "Who – angel or human – ignores something like that for that long?"

Chiyoh nurses a cup of brewed tea in one hand. Her gloved thumb runs along the side of the cup. "I agree," she says. She speaks in a way now that's different from earlier on in the day. Something he's never heard from her before: an almost-gentle tone layers through her words. The Chiyoh Will has known for almost four centuries has always been abrupt and serious. Every so often, something in that hardened demeanour will change, but it's not a regular occurrence. She sighs, bringing the cup to her lips. "I think the killings are a recent venture," she says after swallowing a sip.

A family in the next town had been killed. 'Killed' is a gentle word. Will would say 'slaughtered'. But that's what Chiyoh had managed to pick up from listening in on two local women quietly gossip about it between aisles of a late-night, local convince store.

One of those...things... did it, apparently.

Is that what the police are saying?

No, no. But you know their kind. Vicious things. I heard from Vera that one landed near the Patterson land almost a week ago. I wouldn't be surprised if it's still around.

Will frowned.

A newly fallen angel wouldn't have the strength to commit something like that. They would be bleeding and weakened and adjusting to their body changing. Apparently, the entire family of five were killed: each of them was in their own beds when their throats were slit. Clean deaths. If it had been by Dolarhyde's hand, Will can only imagine the cuts being made by Dolarhyde's retained *adamas* blade.

Hannibal's been quiet. Will glances over to the other only to find him looking down at the material of the table, running his eyes over the grain of the wood. Will reaches for one of Hannibal's hands. "What're you thinking about?" he prods.

Hannibal turns his hand upwards, letting Will curl his fingers around his. “Out of every possible place in the world to be in, why would he be here?”

“He must have heard about the falling,” Will suggests, “maybe it was localised?” It wouldn’t be the first time. Most purging, particularly the first few, spread all over the world. Fallen landed in every corner of the world. There has been once or twice where only a handful of angels – a number that still was in the hundreds – fell in one specific area. Now, that area could have been throughout an entire country: but it was localised to just there.

It had once made Will’s job so much easier.

Now, he thought as he squeezed Hannibal’s hand, *it’s only causing problems*.

“Let us say that he was brought here because of that, then,” Hannibal accounts, “why would he seek out freshly fallen siblings? What use would they be to him?”

They’d be injured, Will thinks. *Injured and weak and-*

He frowns.

Suggestible. The mind of a recently fallen angel is a delicate thing: reeling from the events that just happened. They would be in shock, trying to make sense of what happened, trying to justify their actions that led them to be cast out. He used to think that’s why there was always two breeds of fallen: one who respected and loved Father’s creations, and one who didn’t.

If someone like Dolarhyde approached them, and told them just about anything, they might just go along with it.

If he were like the Will who still did his appointed job, he could very well ask them to stand up and walk straight to Limbo’s gates. And they would do it.

Something catches the corner of his eye. A shadow moving along the wall. Will doesn’t pay it any attention. If Gabriel can still reach out to him, Will supposes that he’ll try again soon enough. Maybe he’ll tell Will something more substantial about this whole thing. Will almost scoffs. It’s unlikely.

But he blinks back to the kitchen and finds Hannibal looking at him, brow slightly furrowed. “What is it?”

Their hands are still joined on the table. Chiyoh glances between the two of them, but stays silent as she sips the rest of her tea. Will bites the inside of his cheek. “Nothing,” he says, biting the inside of his cheek. Even with nothing physically in the house, he knows there are eyes searching for him. Waiting for him to put a foot wrong. They already infected his dreams.

Chiyoh finishes her tea. Setting the cup down in the middle of the table, she sighs and glances over to a window that looks out on to the nearby forest. The moon is perched high in the sky, peering over the tops of trees. “He could be coming for you,” she says to no one in particular. Will’s eyes flicker over to Hannibal. The other seems to be considering her words.

She presses on. “It’s entirely possible that Dolarhyde heard all about this recent falling. And if he heard about it, he must understand why it happened in the first place. He could be searching for you, Hannibal.” She turns back to them, looking straight at Will. “Or you.”

Something cold starts coiling through his veins. “He would hardly know who I am,” Will argues.

Chiyoh doesn’t look convinced. “Do you know if Dolarhyde still has his wings?” she addresses Hannibal – as if he still held contact with the creature.

“If he had his wings, the consul would have been able to locate him already,” Hannibal replies. His hold on Will’s hand tightens slightly. He cocks his head. “That begs the question: did he remove his own wings?”

“Possibly. But he could still have traces of blessed blood in him. He never went through the fall. His body was never truly purged.” Chiyoh brushes a strand of hair from her face. “He would be able to listen in on Gabriel’s speeches.”

The nightmare. Will’s mind is drawn back to that night: how it really felt like the consul had invaded their home. Flashes of it replay in his mind. The metallic smell of blood stings his nostrils. The hold he has on Hannibal’s hand is what grounds him to the present: Hannibal is *here*. Not bleeding out in the living room. Will isn’t kneeling at the feet of Michael, an *adamas* blade pressed against his throat.

“Gabriel broadcasted. He spoke directly to *you*, Will, but who’s to say that in an effort to get that message to you, Gabriel didn’t whisper, but shouted.” Chiyoh shrugs a shoulder. “If Dolarhyde listened in, he would know exactly who you are. And who apparently turned you.”

That last part strikes something into his chest. It feels dangerously like fear. He’s careful to purge the feeling out from his body. He shouldn’t be afraid. Bigger, nastier fallen had awaited him in past centuries: coiled and ready to strike if he ever uncovered them. He had been a skilled fighter.

But now? He’s without wings. The last of his blessed blood is being purged from his veins. With nothing declaring him an angel anymore, he won’t be able to pick up, let alone use, an *adamas* blade. The muscle along his spine has only just begun to heal up. The stitches still knit the last bits of skin together. If Francis Dolarhyde – someone with a distinct advantage over all three of them – ever found this place, Will entertains the dark notion that they wouldn’t stand a chance.

Will hardly notices that his grip on Hannibal’s hand has turned tight. It’s only when Hannibal touches his wrist, gentle fingertips running along the tendons that jut out beneath his skin, does he look down and quickly release his grip. “Sorry,” he mumbles.

Chiyoh stands, bringing her cup over to the sink to wash. “I’m going to do a sweep of the land around the house: make sure we’re alone here.”

Hannibal looks over to her, nodding once. “Be vigilant. He could still be within the area.”

Chiyoh's departure is signalled by the front door closing. Hannibal lets out an uneven breath. Rubbing his free hand over his face, he schools his expression back into something neutral. Will watches it all change: how something will flash over Hannibal's features for the briefest of seconds, before disappearing entirely. Will places his free hand over Hannibal's exposed forearm. Warmth weaves slowly up through his skin. Hannibal glances down at where they touch, and sighs. "What are you thinking about?" Will's voice is low: as if Gabriel or Dolarhyde were listening in on them now.

It isn't often that Hannibal finds himself confused, or unsure, about something. For as long as Will has known him, the other fallen won't invest in doing anything unless he has explicit control over everything. But he *does* revel in uncertainty. He likes to watch for reactions and outcomes. Eons have been spent curiously prodding at things, wondering if they'll bend or break. The Hannibal that is sitting with him doesn't look like that.

The other fallen shakes his head. "It's nothing. I'm merely just trying to relay all of today's information."

Will's building his own narrative within his own head. Still, he tugs gently on Hannibal's arm. "Let's go back to bed. Some sleep will do us good. We'll reconvene in a couple of hours and see what we have to work with."

Neither of them will sleep. He knows that. Knowing that someone like Dolarhyde is loose within the area will keep them vigilant. But it's been a while since Will has slept properly: something his aching back and changing body is constantly reminding him of. Hannibal seems amenable. The other fallen stands, hand still firmly linked in Will's, and they go upstairs.

Something has fallen over the house. A heavy, foreboding feeling that sours the air and makes it almost rancid. It takes Will a moment to recognise it as dread. The Dragon's wings have enveloped the house in shadow, looming over them. Will shakes it off as both he and Hannibal settle into bed. As soon as Will pulls the last of the sheets over their bodies, he feels Hannibal's arm creep around him, tugging him back against the other's chest.

"*And behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth."*

Will wakes a few hours later in bed, surrounded by familiarity. Hannibal's arm is still draped over his middle, keeping him gently cradled against the other's chest. The nest of blankets still keeps them comfortably warm against the winter's chilly nip. The floorboards downstairs creak as Chiyoh returns from her routine check of the perimeter's borders.

But what's not familiar, and makes his skin prickle and crawl and his heart tremble within his chest, is the sound of an archangel speaking within the room.

Shadows don't creep from the corners. There isn't the sound of wings beating against harsh winds deafening his ears. When he opens his eyes and blinks, all he sees is the bedroom. The furniture and his clothes tossed over the back of a nearby chair.

And then he sees Gabriel.

Gabriel stands a couple of feet from the bed; not as a figure cloaked in shadow, but as an armoured archangel. A longsword is sheathed against his back, with the pommel peering over his shoulder. His armour's plating still gleams and shines. Intricate details carved into the plating are still bright and clear. The metal hasn't brandished a single mark. That is because Gabriel has never seen a battle: he stays within the clouds while Michael fights their wars.

His face is impassive. Each of the seven archangels looks eerily similar to each other. Small, minute differences tell them apart. Father's early voyage into genetics, Will supposes. He needed a way to tell his seven firstborns apart: as if their conflicting personalities didn't do that just fine. But Gabriel's face is just as angular and gaunt as his siblings. It's neither masculine nor feminine. Something in between but something entirely other.

"I wish to speak with you, little brother. Plainly, if I may?"

The archangel's speaking voice is vastly different to the one he uses for his messages and broadcasts. It still holds some resonance. It still makes Will want to submit and listen as he had done for eons without question. But it's softer. It allows more room for something as banal as emotion to seep through.

Will manages to get an arm underneath himself and push his torso from the bed. Hannibal's arm slides further down, now hugging around his hip. Gabriel barely registers the movement: or the other person in the bed with Will. Will wonders for a brief moment if Gabriel can even see the scene in front of him.

His eyes are fixed. They lock with Will's, keeping eye contact with him, but for a moment Will suspects that maybe, just maybe, Gabriel can't see anything at all. The Messenger is blind. Even the fallen at his back doesn't seem disturbed by Will's movement: or the sound or presence of an archangel in the room. The sound of his breathing hasn't changed from the rhythmic slow, deep breaths he takes during the night when at rest.

For the first time, Gabriel speaks to Will seemingly without the knowledge of Michael or his other siblings: without them listening in or passing on messages to be delivered instead.

This is a conversation for them and only them. He knows, in reality, he still sleeps in Hannibal's arms. In reality, this is nothing more than a dream – one different to the others the archangel inflicted on him, but this is just only further proof that the archangel is just grasping now. He knows Will is starting to slip away. And he needs to make every message count.

Gabriel loosens a breath – one almost resembling a sigh. “This will be the last time I will be able to speak with you.” He tilts his head slightly. “Raphael informs me that you must be nearing the end of your metamorphosis.”

Oh, Will allows himself to think. *That must be a painful thing for you to admit. That your **little brother** is being changed into the very things you hate.*

If Gabriel even heard Will’s projected thoughts, he makes no indication of it. “As I do not have much time with you, I will be brief. The creature now known as Francis Dolarhyde believes himself to be a Great Red Dragon,” Gabriel recites. Will can hear Michael’s words come out of the archangel. He can only imagine what stories the commander has been weaving to the consulate. Gabriel presses on. “He poses a very real threat to our kind and Father’s creations here on this world. I, nor my larks, are able to find him. But it is my understanding that he may be looking for you. I believe it may have something to do with your relationship with the fallen.”

A silent moment settles over the room.

“Why did you want me to kill him?” Will asks plainly. His voice hardly carries itself across the room, but he knows Gabriel has heard him. When he doesn’t get an answer, he presses, “*why* did you ask me to kill Hannibal?”

Gabriel straightens. “When we had suddenly lost contact with one of our own, outside of a purging, Michael investigated. He saw an angel, Dolarhyde, speaking with a fallen. *Your* fallen, to be exact. Days later, Michael saw that same angel without his wings, wandering through this plain as if he were felled. To have that happen was entirely foreign our commander – for all of us. We did not know how to act.”

Something brief and minute flashes across Gabriel’s face. “It terrifies him, little brother. He is too prideful to admit it, but it does. It terrifies him that someone like your fallen bedmate can change our kind as easily as he has.”

Will frowns. “You think there have been others?”

Gabriel doesn’t reply.

“How many do you think Hannibal has turned?” Will prods.

“We know of Dolarhyde, and you, of course-”

“-*You* were the ones to do this to me,” he suddenly snarls, “not him. Hannibal never turned me. He didn’t turn Dolarhyde either. I don’t know what story Michael is trying to spin you all, but it’s not true.”

Something shadows across Gabriel’s face.

“You wanted me to kill Hannibal because you thought him capable of turning more of my siblings?” Will’s frown only deepens. “Listen to me well, *big brother*: what terrifies Michael is the fact that those under his control are capable of making their own decisions. When my

siblings started acting for themselves, or spoke out, Michael purged them. He never did it with me because you could still track me. Isn't that right?"

Gabriel's eyes narrow slightly.

"But you can't track me now," Will presses. "And you can't track Dolarhyde. And you're starting to panic. *If* what you say is true, and Dolarhyde is out to become this...Great Red Dragon...why come to me to help *you*? You who dragged me into the consulate, condemned me, and threw me from the bridge?"

Will tries not to let his voice waver. Gabriel is in control of this realm. If the archangel doesn't particularly agree with what he's saying, he'll be silenced. But he's allowed speak. He's allowed to hurtle abuse at his *big brother*.

Is he hoping that I slip up? Will thinks, happy that Gabriel cannot listen to the words within his head. *Is he wondering if I'll say something that will give something away*?

Gabriel schools his face into something neutral. He holds his head high. "That creature will kill your bedmate, little brother," Gabriel says plainly, folding his hands in front of him. His voice is steady. "A would-be-fallen seeks to become something more. He's trying to ascend."

Will feels the world around him start to tilt. All at once, his vision blurs and tunnel-vision starts to set in.

And behold a great red dragon, Gabriel recites, *having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.*

Gabriel flickers like an afterimage. Something tugs Will back to lie against the mattress, to drift back to sleep.

Their conversation is over now.

And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth.

Chapter End Notes

Apologies this took so long. Christmas happened. Then New Years. Then multiple dentist appointments. Then I had to Fight the Man. Then I graduated.

And I managed to confuse myself in relation to the plot of this thing lol. At some point, this plot just VEERS off course from what I originally had in mind and it threw me for a couple of weeks.

I'm a serious writer.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It isn't common for Will to wake before Hannibal. In all their centuries of sharing beds, he knows that Hannibal always wakes with the sun. He'll either slip out of their bed and potter about, making breakfast, or stay within their nest of sheets and watch as Will gently rouses hours later. Today, though, Will finds himself waking as the first beams of morning light start to stream in through the window. A slight movement at his side catches his attention. He glances over to Hannibal's side of their bed. The other sleeps peacefully, facing Will, with an arm pillowed under his head. He seems to be another world away. Gently, Will reaches out and ghosts his fingertips through Hannibal's hair, taming it slightly.

Hannibal is a light sleeper: but he doesn't even flinch when Will curls his fingers around the strands of hair. He does let out a small snuffle against his pillow, but buries his nose into the crook of his arm, and sinks further into sleep. Will's heart tightens in his chest. He can only imagine the number of nights he's spent awake, watching over Will as he recovered from his fall. Sleep is owed. Slowly, Will retracts his hand, and turns on to his back. His head rolls to face the other side of the room.

He eyes the corner of the room where Gabriel had stood. Or a projection of Gabriel. He still tries to wrap his head around what exactly just happened last night. The archangel's voice still lingers in his head: his gentle speaking voice, laced with warning and caution. Will frowns. He's never heard Gabriel speak like that before. He can count on one hand the number of times he's heard Gabriel use a normal speaking voice. Usually, their conversations are through broadcasts and Gabriel's larks whispering into his ear. To hear the archangel, to listen to words that evidently weren't coming from another, it was the strangest thing Will has ever experienced.

But he needs to shake it off. Everything he's learned over the past few days swirls around in his mind. He'll need to write this all down somewhere. Hannibal, being Hannibal, will have a collection of notebooks somewhere. Maybe this house has a library that he just hasn't found yet. Maybe he'll be able to find more preserved scripture that the other fallen is so keen on keeping and preserving.

As the rising morning sun starts to perch in the sky, Will slowly slips out of bed. It takes more effort than he'll ever admit, but he tries not to strain his back. There's a slight thrum of pain when he sits on the edge of the bed, and it worsens into a sharp stab when he stands to full height, but as he moves around the room, searching for some items of clothing, the pain slowly ebbs away.

He manages to wrangle a tee, a plaid overshirt, some worn jeans, and boots on to him without much difficulty. And, remarkably, without stirring Hannibal. Every so often, Will casts a glance over to the bed, and sees the fallen still sleeping peacefully among their nest of sheets. For the briefest of moments, Will wonders if the fallen is even alive. But the worry is chased away by the rhythmic rise and fall of Hannibal's chest.

Will's ears prick at the sound of the front door to the house opening and closing. He leaves the bedroom, taking care to gently click the door shut behind him. He manages to avoid creaky floorboards on the landing and staircase as he investigates downstairs.

Chiyoh silently glides around the kitchen, placing what looks to be a cut of wrapped meat into the refrigerator. She still has her rifle slung over her shoulder. Will can only assume that she's managed to find some game out in the nearby forest she likes to stalk through.

"Is Hannibal still asleep?" she says suddenly, shutting the door of the fridge and turning to Will.

He nods. "Out like a light," he says softly – as if raising his voice any more could rouse the dead-to-the-world fallen upstairs. But knowing how lightly the fallen *can* sleep, he wouldn't be surprised if Hannibal did wake up from that.

Chiyoh squares her jaw.

"Why? Did you need him for something?" Will tilts his head.

Clasped in one gloved hand are the keys to the car. "I need to get some supplies. I wondered if he wanted to join me."

Hannibal probably has a list as long as his arm of things they need. Food is at the top of that list. Though, Will can't imagine them staying in this house much longer. Even though the dragon hasn't made his presence known to any of them, something is still hanging over the house. The dragon stalks through shadows, watching them all carefully.

Will bites the inside of his cheek. "I can come with you."

Chiyoh's eyes narrow slightly. "You're injured," she says shortly.

"I'm recovering-"

"-You're *injured*," she presses. The town she's been frequenting the past couple of days is a small one. Will vaguely remembers waking up in the car as they passed it. The town isn't anything substantial. It's remote, with fields of ploughed land surrounding it: all belonging to farmers and labourers. The main road runs straight through the middle of the town, with its buildings lining either side. There's a convenience store, a grocer's, a butcher's, and a hardware store. Nothing remarkable, but enough to keep them going.

Chiyoh sighs, twirling the keys in her hand. "I don't want to leave Hannibal alone here, either."

Will cocks his head. "Hannibal is capable of defending himself." Out of the three of them, he's been felled the longest. He's survived for the longest. He's doing pretty damn well, in Will's opinion.

But *technically*, Francis is still an angel. He never went through the fall: he'll have his blessed blood, and all of his powers to accompany it. He won't be able to fly, or track, or do anything that a winged angel could do – but Francis is stronger than all three of them

combined. And he'll be armed. Will can only imagine that the dragon managed to hang on to his *adamas* blade after he decided to clip his wings.

"Do you think Francis is still here?" Will prods.

Chiyoh shrugs a shoulder. "He's followed Gabriel's voice. He knows we're *somewhere* here, but he can't pinpoint where."

He's stalking the area: keeping to the shadows and only moving through the darkness. With the sun now starting to hitch itself high in the sky, Will can't imagine Dolarhyde being brave enough to hunt during the day.

The dragon's wings are unfurled, casting a dark shadow over the town. As soon as they drive into the town, Will bristles. Something's electrifying the air. There are clusters of people bundled in thick jackets and scarves along the pavements, chattering among each other. *Probably talking about the attack*, Will thinks. The journey from the house to the town is spent in silence. As Will watches the sidewalks, Chiyoh silently keeps her eyes on the long stretch of road.

Not once do they spot any kind of police car. No officers or detectives stand at the pavements, or go between stores, or talk to the people already outside. Will doesn't know how far away the family must have lived from the town, but to see no police around, it's unnerving. He entertains the notion that they're probably swarming the house and the surrounding area. The family must live somewhere like Wolf Trap: empty fields fenced in by thick forests.

They pull up outside a small convenience store: one that Chiyoh must have visited yesterday. She isn't able to buy in bulk: who knows when they're going to have to leave. And Will isn't too fond of the idea of leaving a fridge full of food to rot in an emptied house.

As soon as Will steps out of the car, he's brushed by a biting breeze of cold air. Winter is starting to roll in. The wind is bitterly cold, nipping harshly at Will's cheeks and nose. His back groans. The stitched wounds aren't fond of the harsh weather. Chiyoh sends him a questioning glance from her side. "Everything alright?" she asks slowly.

Will nods. He isn't sure if the pain is starting to ebb away naturally, or if he's just getting more used to it being there, but he's able to stand on his own two legs, take steady steps forward, and move around unhindered.

The store looks as bleak as the town. Its windows are grubby and mottled around the edges, and whatever space is clean, is covered in a collection of new and old posters and fliers. All

advertise the mundane, human things like bake sales or school dances or events within the town. Will doesn't spend long reading them. Chiyoh leads them to the storefront.

They pause.

Hastily-made posters are stuck to the glass of the store's front door. HUMANS ONLY. Will cocks his head. *What?* He glances to Chiyoh, who despite being able to hold a neutral expression at the best of times, looks equally as confused by the sign. She meets his gaze, but leads them both inside the store. They're not two steps in the door before Will's ears twitch at the sound of a heated argument at the nearby register.

"I'm tellin' you, I *saw* it!" A man stands at one side of the register: thick and burly and smelling faintly of the earth. *A local farmer*, Will notes, as he follows Chiyoh into the store.

"What you saw was just a man. The cops are dealin' with it, Joe," the clerk says, almost-meekly placing a collection of items into a plastic bag.

Joe shakes his head. "I have a cousin in the city," he continues, lowering his voice slightly. "She said that they're finding those things all over the place!"

Will tries to busy himself perusing an aisle of canned foods and sauces. The blood in his veins suddenly runs cold. *They're finding the fallen*, he thinks. Confused, freshly fallen angels with no idea where they are. Will's heart tightens in his chest.

Chiyoh catches his elbow. "Come," she orders, leading him further into the store. There's a display of fresh winter vegetables. Chiyoh loads up a small cloth bag with carrots, parsnips, and leeks. As she busies herself, Will glances around. He can still see the cashier and the other man over the top of the stands.

The cashier bristles. "The cops are dealin' with it," he says firmly, handing back Joe's change and pushing his groceries towards him. "What happened to the Morelli's was a damn tragedy-"

The man straightens. "-John Morelli was damn near one of them! Did you not hear?"

Will inhales. *What*.

The cashier quickly looks in each direction before pointing to the door. "Come on, now, Joe. Please." Will watches the cashier squirm slightly. His own mind reels. *John Morelli was damn near one of them.* Joe huffs before muttering a *see ya*. Once he's out of the store, the cashier's shoulders slacken.

John Morelli was damn near one of them. Will mulls as Chiyoh finishes grabbing the last of what they need. A fallen living all the way out here: within a family unit. It's hidden, that's for sure. Michael – or Will, back when he used to do his job – certainly wouldn't look all the way out here for any fallen. Fallen like cities. The bigger the better. Despite what some might think, it's easier to disappear in a city: lots of cracks and crevasses to slither into and wait out a Watcher.

He glances between the two of them. “I’ve never seen you guys before,” he says.

Will offers a small smile. “Just visiting a friend for a few days,” he says simply, before glancing back around the store. A couple of people mill around some stands, picking out mundane cartons of milk and loaves of bread.

“We heard that there was some kind of trouble out here,” Will starts, eyeing the cashier. To his credit, the young man keeps his attention on scanning through their groceries.

“Yeah, um,” he eventually replies, when Chiyoh steps to the side to start bagging their stuff herself. The cashier is a meek-looking thing: tall, lanky, and thin, with a mousey-expression and hair that flops down on to his eyes. He pushes his hair from his face. “Some local family was murdered. I don’t know if it made local news or anythin’, but it...” The cashier trails off.

Will can only imagine that the news *did* travel. An entire family, slaughtered in their own home. Something like that travels leagues within hours. Especially, Will notes, if the potential murderer was a fallen.

Will nods. “And the sign?” he nods to the door. “*Humans only*. What’s that about?”

Chiyoh sends him a sideways glare. *Shut up. This is why I don’t bring you anywhere.*

At that, the cashier just swallows. “Well,” he lets out a choked laugh, “that was the manager. I haven’t seen any, but apparently – I don’t know – they’re around.”

Chiyoh hands over a small wad of bills. “Thanks,” she says briskly, before reaching for Will’s elbow and dragging him away.

“You don’t believe in any of that stuff, do you?” Will cocks his head. He’s been around long enough to know damn well that what humans don’t understand, they don’t believe. Fallen have been around since the beginning of time, assimilating into human life. He wouldn’t be surprised if half of the world had some strand of fallen blood in them.

The mousey-looking cashier flushes. “Well, I, I’ve never,” he manages to get out before the bell hanging over the store’s door rings. Chiyoh’s hold on Will’s elbow tightens. Will holds up his free hand.

“It’s okay,” he gives a light laugh. “Who knows what to believe, these days.” It’s apparently enough for the cashier, whose attention is grabbed by an elderly woman starting to stack her groceries at the register.

Hannibal is awake when they get back. The smell of bread baking greets Will as he pushes the front door open. His ears prick at the sound of Hannibal moving around in the kitchen. A

pan sizzling also catches his attention. Chiyoh steps into the house, closing the door behind both of them.

As more scents of frying sausage and bacon float out from the kitchen, Will's stomach grumbles. The scent only intensifies when he steps into the kitchen. In all the centuries he's spent sharing quarters with Hannibal, he's never seen the fallen go without provisions. He tends to make do with what he has, and make the most out of it. Hannibal moves silently around the kitchen, stirring the contents of pots and turning thick cuts of back bacon and sausage.

Before the strain on his back can become too much, Will strides forward and places the groceries on a free space on the kitchen island.

Hannibal doesn't look up from the pan. "Chiyoh took you on an errand run?"

"Not exactly," Will shrugs, wincing slightly at the sharp nip of a tightening stitch. "She didn't want me to go. I went anyway."

At that, Hannibal looks up. "Why?"

"Because I need to move." Three plates already wait by the side of the stove. Beside it, cutlery has been paired off, and three mugs stand idly by the coffee machine.

Will chews the inside of his cheek. "The town knows about the attack."

One of the stove burners is switched off. "Yes, I would assume word would have travelled," Hannibal nods. "It's a small town and humans can be prone to gossip."

Prone to gossip, Will repeats in his own head. He recounts to the store, and what he overheard. "There was a guy in the convenience store," Will says, leaning to rest his hip against the side of the kitchen island, "he was talking to the cashier. He said that one of the victims was a fallen."

Hannibal's brow rises. It's the biggest response Will's managed to get out of him throughout their conversation. As he tilts his head to get a better look at Hannibal's face, he's surprised to see the other fallen genuinely surprised. "Well," Hannibal blinks, turning off the last stove burner, "that's certainly interesting."

Will frowns. "Interesting?"

"And did anyone believe him?"

There's a silent moment that passes between both of them. Will eventually shakes his head.

"I've always wondered if many of today's humans believed in our kind," Hannibal mulls, plating each breakfast and filling mugs with freshly brewed coffee. Will's stomach almost seizes. As the last of his blood changes, energy is being drawn out of him. Even the journey into town was a bit too much. His muscles groan and his joints ache and tiredness is seeping into his very bones. But he wouldn't let on to Chiyoh – or even to Hannibal. He needs to move around. Cabin fever is starting to set in.

Chiyoh appears at the portal of the door, arms folded over her chest and an expressionless look on her face. “Do you believe him?”

Hannibal takes two of the plates to the table. “Excuse me?”

“I’m asking: do *you* believe him? The cashier. Do you believe him when he said one of the victims was a fallen?”

Will wordlessly takes the other plate to the table. Chiyoh moves the mugs. Only when they’re all seated around the small, circle dining table does Hannibal respond. “I would have to see for myself.”

Chiyoh’s eyes darken. “I’m not taking you to the house, if that’s what you’re implying.”

“I think it would be an interesting development for Francis to move on from killing human families to ones containing a fallen father-figure.” Hannibal’s head cocks to the side. “I’m simply wondering what caused the change in target. I’ve always assumed that Francis would have liked to have fallen on his side. Why kill them?”

There’s a moment within the conversation that the only thing Will can do is pick at his breakfast. As he cuts into sausage, bacon, eggs, and toast, he wordlessly listens to the arguments being pelted backwards and forwards by the others at the table. Hannibal is a curious creature. There had been a time – an angry time – where Will proclaimed that the curiosity was going to get Hannibal killed. A human was going to be too much of a fascination, or another fallen would lash out at Hannibal’s attempt to help them.

The curse of being a Watcher is that Will has seen too much. He’s seen how humans treat fallen. He’s seen how fallen treat humans.

Even as he tries to focus on the food in front of him, he glances up every so often to take in Hannibal’s demeanour. He looks curious. He looks as though he could stand up at any moment and walk to the other side of the town to investigate for himself. Even though he hides it well – holding a steady and level conversation with Chiyoh, cutting and eating his own breakfast in between talking – Will can see it.

Will’s brought to the present when Chiyoh directs a question at him. “You were the one who insisted on listening in,” she says over the rim of her coffee cup. “Did you hear any mention of the children?”

Will frowns slightly. “What about them?”

Something’s swirling in Chiyoh’s eyes. “Are the children human? Or are they halflings?”

There’s a sharp click of tongue by Will’s side. “Chiyoh,” Hannibal scolds.

Will shakes his head. “No, I don’t think they mentioned anything like that.”

Chiyoh’s brow creases. “The family had three children. And it appeared that the cashier and man knew who the parents were. I find it unlikely that John Morelli, or whatever his past name used to be, just ambled into the town and married a divorcee with three children.”

Hannibal's interest must be showing on his face because Chiyoh's expression suddenly turns firm. "You aren't going to that house," she states, setting her cup down a bit too harshly. Some coffee almost sloshes over the rim, but it stays inside.

They finish their breakfast in silence. The scraping of cutlery against the porcelain of the plates is deafening to Will's ear, but at least they aren't talking about the Morelli family anymore. But he does think about them. Francis had been killing random, human families since becoming...whatever he is now. A dragon? That's what Gabriel called him. *That's what Francis likes to call himself, according to Gabriel*, his mind supplies.

And while it baffles him that the consulate must have known about this for centuries, and didn't do much to stop it, Will does wonder what prompted Francis to move on to killing fallen. And their children, if the Morelli children *are* half-bloods.

A would-be fallen seeks to become something more. He's ascending. Gabriel's words whisper in his ear. If this is Francis beginning to ascend, from killing humans to fallen, Will dreads to think what follows.

Would he be as bold as to go after an angel?

The knife and fork almost drop from his hands. *Would he*?

Francis seeks to become a dragon, his mind states, *a dragon that caused the falling of countless angels.*

Who is the only creature you know who could do something like that?

Will snaps back when his now empty plate is being taken from him. "Would you like more?" Hannibal asks quietly. Just over his shoulder, Will can see Chiyoh placing her own plate and mug into the kitchen sink. Will shakes his head.

Chiyoh stands at the sink, rolling up the sleeves of her shirt. "I'll do them," she says quietly, taking the dishes from Hannibal.

Hannibal walks back towards the table. When he reaches Will's side, he lets his fingertips trace lightly over Will's shoulder. "Come with me for a moment," he says quietly, continuing out towards the living room.

Chiyoh eyes him from the sink, but says nothing. When Will gets into the living room, he sees that Hannibal has made it halfway up the stairs. He wordlessly follows Hannibal all the way up and down the hallway, pausing outside the door to their shared room. Hannibal silently walks to the other side of the room, to an old chest of drawers.

Will steps inside. The sheets of the bed are still muddled from earlier. Well, his side is. Hannibal's side is immaculately made: sheets tucked in and pillows propped against the headboard. Maybe Hannibal thought that Will would have liked to crawl back into bed at some point during the day. As his metamorphosis nears its end, he isn't as tired as he used to be. But a nap never went astray.

“Sit down for me,” Hannibal says, nodding his head to the bed.

Will perches at the foot of the bed. Hannibal pulls out a drawer and starts fumbling inside for something. Whatever it is, it’s hidden below folded clothes they haphazardly packed inside. Distantly, he can hear Chiyoh moving around downstairs. She must be preparing for another patrol around the land of the house.

Hannibal takes a cloth-covered item out of the drawer. It fits in his hand perfectly and the object is curved slightly. The cloth is silken, tied with a black, thin rope with an insignia dangling from its end. As Hannibal sits beside Will, he holds the object out for Will to inspect.

And Will doesn’t need the cloth unfolded to know exactly what it is.

The blade that the Angel of the Eastern Gate gave him.

The blade he was supposed to kill Hannibal with.

Will remembers leaving the damn thing in Hannibal’s office in Baltimore while they chased each other up a flight of stairs and fell into bed together. He hasn’t given a thought to the blade since.

“It’s yours,” Hannibal says softly, carefully unfurling the tie and cloth from around the blade. Pillowed in Hannibal’s hand, with the cloth separating the metal of the blade from Hannibal’s skin, it sits there, staring up at the two of them. “I thought you might want it back.”

Will swallows. “It was never mine,” he replies. His owned blade – a lithe straight sword that was always sheathed by his waist – is long gone. Truthfully, he can’t remember where he left it. Lodged underneath a floorboard of some house he used to live in, probably. As time slowly unfurled, the need for a sword like it began to wither away. As did Will’s need to use it against fallen. If he wasn’t going to fight them anymore, he certainly didn’t need a gleaming *adamas* straight sword.

He can feel Hannibal’s gaze on the side of his face. “You’ll need something to defend yourself with,” the fallen reasons, tilting the dagger just enough for more light to catch along the shining blade. All along the centre of the blade are engraved letterings – an incantation from Azrael.

Will’s fingers twitch. He’s held the blade only once: when he unsheathed it in Hannibal’s office. And even then, he merely placed it to the side, dismissible of it. And here it is: stowed away in a drawer, beneath a pile of folded clothes.

But he isn’t an angel. It could burn him. *Adamas* is a blessed metal. Azrael blesses it personally after it’s been smithed. It’s specifically designed not to be touched by *any* creature other than its wielder. And that wielder is always an angel. He’s never known any fallen to carry their blades after their fall. The blades themselves either get lost to the wind, scattered to another corner of the world, or they stay in the crater where their own landed. An armed fallen doesn’t exist.

“Who told you that fallen couldn’t have blades such as this?” Hannibal asks. His voice is soft, but there’s something laced through his words.

A quick, but thorough, check through his memories gives Will his answer. “No one,” he says slowly. “I just assumed...”

Hannibal hums. “Swords and daggers and bows get lost during purges,” he explains, turning the dagger again.

Will reaches out, his fingertips hovering just above the blade of the dagger. The shining metal glistens and glints with the sunlight that’s streaking into the room. He tries to keep his fingers from trembling as the pads of his fingertips meet the cool blade of the dagger. It’s a shock. Instead of a bolt of stinging, sharp pain, he feels chilled metal.

His fingers curl around the pommel. It fits perfectly in his palm. It might have never been his to call his own, but the Angel of the Eastern Gate did mention that Azrael had crafted this specifically for Will.

Will lets out a long sigh. “Gabriel spoke to me during the night. Not as a shadow, but as an archangel.” Hannibal stiffens slightly at his side. “He told me that Michael’s greatest fear is an angel who thinks for themselves. He said that Michael *saw* Francis – without wings, walking around this world as if he belonged here. But instead of smiting him there and then, he...did nothing?” Will’s grip around the pommel of the dagger tightens. “He wants *you* dead. Not Francis. He thinks...I don’t know, that you’re this influencing voice. That if he takes you out, those you’ve turned will just...turn back?”

Hannibal blinks, and for a too long of a moment, says nothing. When he speaks, it’s quiet. “Do you remember how to use it?” he nods to the dagger in Will’s hand.

Will swallows past a lump that has been trying to lodge in his throat for the past minute. He nods. It won’t be as effective as a sword, but the dagger will do. And the muscles of his back are starting to get strong again. Hannibal reaches for the side of Will’s face. Gentle fingertips trail along his jaw. Will tries not to shrink back once Hannibal’s eyes start bearing into his own. “If what you think is true, and I have no doubt that it is,” he starts, “then we must be prepared. Your siblings, what’s left of them up above, will do anything their commander says. If they don’t, I’m sure Gabriel will persuade them.”

Warmth from Hannibal’s touch slowly seeps into Will’s skin: searing through his jaw, running along his cheek and into the rest of his body. Will has to stop a shiver from ricocheting up through his spine.

Hannibal moves to cup Will’s cheek, running his thumb along the other’s cheekbone. “You said it yourself, my love,” he breathes. “Michael’s worst fear is an angel who can think for themselves. One who can make their own decisions. One who has free will to do whatever it is they want to do. Is that not what you’ve done?”

Will swallows.

“Should he not be fearful of you too?” Hannibal presses. Will’s fingers tighten around the pommel of the blade in his hand. Michael has always had an impassive expression on his face anytime Will went to see him for something. The only emotions the archangel seemed to be able to express were disdain and rage. Fear certainly never crossed Will’s mind.

And the fact that he could potentially be afraid of someone like Will? A Watcher who just gave up after a couple of centuries? It’s enough to make him laugh.

Hannibal leans forward, catching Will’s lips in a soft, but deep kiss. It’s not the first one they’ve shared since getting away from Baltimore, but it still lights something in Will’s blood. He chases after it, stopped only by a sharp intake of breath from the other fallen.

“Careful.”

Glancing down, Will sees the edge of the dagger’s blade inches from Hannibal’s thigh. Even clothed, the burn of the *adamas* could still harm him. Will drops the dagger to the other side of the bed, letting it clatter on to the floor.

With it out of the way, Will coils an arm around Hannibal’s shoulder, moving to straddle the other’s thighs. A thrum of pain ripples through his back, but he pushes it away. Hannibal frames his face in either hand, letting the pads of his thumbs scratch along the rough stubble that’s been growing for the past few days.

Hannibal brushes his nose against Will’s. His hands gently hold on to Will’s hips, keeping him pressed closely to the other’s front. Will’s arms have loosely coiled themselves around his neck. He doesn’t seem too keen to move.

“I love you,” Will suddenly breathes. It’s not the first time those words have tumbled out of his mouth. He’s known the other fallen far too long.

A smile tugs at the corner of Hannibal’s lip. “I love you.”

They aren’t here. He stalks away from yet another house. The town isn’t that large. Its population barely hits the hundred mark. But even then, finding them is proving difficult.

Something within him growls at that realisation. The town won’t hold on to his attention for much longer. Something is thrumming inside in his veins. The creature’s fire is scalding them. At night, he’s restless, stalking through streets and fields, looking into houses and barns and everything in between for them.

They’re here somewhere, it hisses at him. *That fallen runt must have taken a nasty beating from the commander. He’s weak. They couldn’t have gotten far.*

“I know that,” he growls back, snarling at the voice whispering and goading into his ear. His search has only gotten more difficult. With the news of his latest killing spreading through the town like wildfire, the humans are on edge. He can only work through the night now. It allows him to stalk, but humans are watchful. The men stand guard within the house, peering back out through their windows armed with guns and knives, while their families sleep restlessly. During the day, he’s forced to hide.

Killing Galiel and his family had been part of his becoming, but the fallout is now starting to suffocate him-

Galiel needed to be eliminated, the voice bites. *His mate and brood too.*

He glowers over his shoulder. Nothing’s there. Nothing’s ever there. The creature is coiled within his own mind, like a viper, waiting to strike. He pushes the creature away. During the night, during his hunts, he likes to be by himself. The creature can have him during the day.

There’s one long stretch of road that cuts through the centre of the town. It makes stalking easier. With every storefront he passes, he takes a moment to glance inside. Dark interiors make it hard to see anything in particular, but what he does see is a collection of hastily made posters taped to the front windows and doors of the stores. The ones that proclaim that only humans are to enter. That none of his kind are welcome. Ones telling their own kind to be careful.

A frown creases along his brow.

Streetlamps flicker overhead. They blink in an off-beat rhythm, twitching and jittering until it stops, and they light the lone road again. There’s a change in the air. It becomes thick and heavy for a moment. As soon as it changes, it changes back again.

He feels a presence behind him.

“Cassiel,” a deep voice sounds, shattering the silence of the street. “Or am I to refer to you by your mortal name?”

The viper within him hisses and snaps. As he turns, his hand goes to his waist, searching for the pommel of a blade.

Archangels: fitted in gleaming armour, with swords sheathed to their backs. Around them, there’s an aura of light. Their wings are folded neatly to their backs, feathers pluming proudly. The two ragged scars on his own back begin to ache.

One of them, the taller of the two, tilts his head. His crystal blue eyes search up and down Francis’ body before he clicks his tongue. “Whatever has he done to you, Cassiel?”

He doesn’t recognise these two. Michael – he knows that ever-scowling face all too well. Gabriel – he sees him every time he closes his eyes. Azrael? He’s met once when getting his sword. But these two? He has no idea who they are.

One of them steps forward. The taller one who spoke. His armour has scratches on it – faded lines that barely affect the gleam of the polished metal. The archangel that stays in place says nothing. His irises glow a piercing white. Whether it's the colour of the creature's eyes, or some blessed light pouring out of it, he isn't sure.

He takes a measured step back when the armoured archangel approaches. "*And behold a great red dragon*," the archangel lilts, "*having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth.*"

"You look for the Dragon?" the other archangel asks.

Francis shifts his gaze. Nothing moves around them. The wind doesn't travel up the street. The lights overhead don't buzz. Nothing dares to move or make the slightest of sounds.

The taller archangel lifts his chin. "Barachiel," he puts his hand on his chest. He turns and gestures to his brother. "Uriel."

"You found me," Francis says slowly. "How?"

Barachiel's chuckle is light and lilting, but is gone as soon as it's out. "You made yourself quite difficult to find, brother," he gestures over Francis' shoulder – to the lack of wings. "But Gabriel's larks heard all about the murder of a fallen and his family in the area. He sent a few birds to investigate, and that's when they spotted you."

They're lying to you, his creature glowers. *Archangels **lie**. They're deceitful, cunning, manipulative creatures.*

"If it's Zadkiel you are wishing to find, brother," Uriel speaks, "then know we seek the same."

Barachiel nods, his face virtually impassive. "The Dragon needs to die," he states simply, gaze suddenly turning firm. "I'm sure with our combined efforts, we will be able to get rid of him once and for all."

Don't listen to them, his viper hisses. *Michael has something to do with this. They'll drag you back to him and he'll behead you. They'll even mount it outside the consulate-*

Francis chews the inside of his cheek. Pain radiates up through his jaw, chasing all the way up to his head. It's enough to chase the viper away.

"*I* get to kill him," he growls, looking at both of the archangels. "The Dragon is mine to slay."

A pair of matching, sly smiles curl along the archangels' lips.

Chapter End Notes

Ohhhhhhhh, we do stan a bit of conflict!

I'm so sorry this took so long. Life happened. I know that in this chapter, certain things may be conflicting with what I've previously written (like Michael telling Gabriel that he wants Dolarhyde found and killed, so why did Barachiel and Uriel just...find him wandering around? etc.)...I'd just ask that everyone acknowledge the fact that all of this will be dealt with later. Because of Plot.

Also, I don't tend to look back over things. And I get confused easily. So there's that.

Comments & Kudos are very much appreciated!

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal's restless.

Will sees it in the way the fallen stalks and prowls around the house, looking for anything to keep his attention. He takes that bit longer preparing meals: meticulously washing and peeling vegetables, and trimming fat from portions of meat that Chiyoh brings home. Between meals, Will usually finds him bringing in logs for the fire, or in a chair in the living room pouring over one of the books that's kept around.

He managed to ply the other fallen to come for a small walk with him around the property one day. "My back is acting up again," Will explained, gesturing to the front door when he was dressed snugly in outwear. "I was thinking a walk might do me some good. Do you want to come with me?"

There's something hanging over the house. Will knows it's the Dragon. Its wings are unfurled, casting a shadow over the entire house and those within it. It's been several days since the Morelli's were killed. Dolarhyde might have moved on to another location; perhaps frustrated that he couldn't find whatever it was he was looking for.

"Something on your mind?" Will asks before dipping a piece of crusty bread into his soup.

They're alone for dinner. Chiyoh took the car into town, stating that she needed to grab a couple of things from the stores in town. Hannibal seemed happy enough to let her go on her own. She can handle herself. Will knows how capable she is to hold her own.

Still, he occasionally glances to the clock that hangs on a nearby wall. With every jut of the clock hand forward, he finds himself wondering if Chiyoh will be home soon. The house is painfully quiet with just the two of them in it. And while the silence is not awkward, or one of those silences that fall over a pair and thicken the air, Will still needs someone else here, making some sort of noise that isn't the occasional sigh of breath or scrape of cutlery against a bowl or plate.

Hannibal swirls a small trickle of cream into his soup. "Not particularly," he replies airily. He manages to have a couple of sips before Will's insistent stare forces another answer out of him. "I'm just wondering why Dolarhyde would move on to killing a fallen and his children. That's all."

Will picks at a small morsel of bread. "You know why," he says lowly, dropping the bread back on to his plate. Hannibal knows why Dolarhyde has moved on to a stronger target. Hannibal's been thinking over the last couple of days – that's what Will knows. Through all his pacing and prowling around the house and its surrounding land, Hannibal's mind has been constantly turning over itself trying to figure out what it needs to.

A soft sigh leaves Hannibal's nose. "I know that Dolarhyde is hunting me," he says, "and you, by association. I just fail to understand why. If he sees me as the one who freed him of Michael's influence, then why wish me dead?"

Will tries not to let the words sour his tongue. He swallows through another mouthful of soup. He's been mulling over Gabriel's parting words to him. When Hannibal sleeps, his own mind starts churning. *And behold a great red dragon*, the words circle his mind – words that have Gabriel speaking them, *having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth*.

What does Dolarhyde want? That's the question that plagues him during the night. The absence of Gabriel's near-nightly visits is felt. Around the early hours of the morning, when the world outside is deafeningly quiet, Will's ears strain to listen: to hear any word spoken by Gabriel. He's always met with nothing. There's an occasional chirp of crickets outside, but they're not going to give his restless mind any answers.

"Does he think that you're the Dragon?" Will tries. It's the first time in days where he's let his wonderings be let out into the physical world. Hannibal appears to mull it over for a moment. "You told me that Dolarhyde seemed fascinated with Blake's paintings. That he wanted to become that Dragon: the one who caused a great war. Does he see you like that?"

Hannibal takes a measured sip of water before speaking. "The piece of literature that Dolarhyde seemed so obsessed with is merely a collection of words. Words are open to interpretation," is all he says before finishing off the last of his soup and bread.

Will's head hurts. Whether it's pain from his back taking a trip upwards or something else entirely, he doesn't know. But it isn't helped by the fact that he's losing sleep. Thoughts plague him. They come for him in the night, when it's quiet and still and his guard starts to lower. During the day, he can busy himself. He can do what Hannibal's been doing and wander aimlessly around the house, looking for something to do. But during the night, when Hannibal slips off to sleep and Will's left alone, waiting for sleep to come for him, that's when they'll creep forward and gnaw.

He actually starts to miss Gabriel's incessant nattering in his ear. At least with Gabriel, Will could tell him to shut up, and he just might. Even with Hannibal's arms around him, or his own arms around Hannibal, his mind just won't be quiet.

Dolarhyde wants to become the Dragon, his mind analyses one night. Will's now-burning eyes register that it's almost three in the morning. His vision is starting to get blurry, and the red, LED numbers of the time start to swirl together. Hannibal's arm strung over his waist tightens slightly as the fallen presses himself closer to Will's back. There's a warm puff of breath against the back of Will's neck, but he registers that the other fallen isn't actually

awake. Will stays still for a moment. Numbers on the digital clock continue to change by the minute before he sighs.

As carefully as he can manage, he escapes Hannibal's hold and gets out of bed. He puts the comforter back in place, hoping that the sudden cold of Will's missing body won't bring Hannibal out of sleep. The floorboards creak under his feet, but he manages to get to the hallway without anyone sticking their heads out of doorways to investigate.

The living room is bathed in moonlight. With nothing surrounding the house, moonlight has no problem finding its way into the rooms of the house. Will doesn't have to turn on any lights to navigate the room. For a brief moment, he's transported back to the night of his nightmare: of Michael and the others standing in this very room, holding a blade to his throat, and spouting threats. He tries to shake the panic away as he steps further into the room, eventually stopping in the middle of it. A stray streak of moonlight draws his gaze towards one of the bookshelves within the room.

A copy of the bible sits snugly between some classics of literature. Will wanders over to the bookcase, eyeing the book for a moment. He reaches out to run his fingertips over its spine. It looks so out of place on the bookshelf: amid writers like Dante, Aristotle, and Dostoyevsky. He fishes it out.

It's an old tome. The leather is worn around the edges, and the once-golden lettering is now dulled and cracked. He thumbs through a couple of pages before he notices the corners of a couple of them have been folded once upon a time. The faint inseam is visible. He isn't sure how long Hannibal has owned this particular safe house, or if he had ever used it before now, but Will's sure that the other fallen has poured over a book like this for the sake of curiosity.

They were around when it was being written. Will faintly remembers hearing the news that a handful of humans were attempting to put together a book: a book that was the written word of God. It was one of the few times Will had seen Hannibal's curiosity peaked. He wandered into cities that housed these writers, and even approached them; asking if he could read what they had already written. He needed to know what they thought of the Almighty.

What did humans think of the father of them all? – The father they've never even met.

So, it doesn't surprise Will at all that throughout the years of wandering into various homes of Hannibal's, he keeps finding various editions of that very book. He flicks through the pages, running his eyes over the segmented paragraphs and their annotations. Personally, he's never paid any mind to the book. What Hannibal found so fascinating about it, he never understood. He could see why, objectively, humans arguing among themselves over something their father may or may not have said could be interesting. But that's it, in Will's case.

He doesn't pay any one section too much attention. As he nears the back of the book, a lump starts forming in his throat. With every page turned, he nears the segment that Dolarhyde seems so interested in: the segment that's constantly been whispered into his ear for the past few days.

He thumbs towards the back of the book, eyes scanning over every paragraph before they focus on one segment.

THE WOMAN, THE CHILD, AND THE DRAGON.

Will's eyes scan over the words. He remembers the night of the first falling. The first *purge* as he eventually started calling it.

He wasn't there to see the banishment. He stood on a crumbling garden wall with an angel, watching older siblings fall through the clouds and crash into the surrounding lands.

Whoever wrote this bit of the book must have spoken to a fallen. Everything Will reads rings true about that night. *They must have told them everything*, he thinks as he flicks to the next page. Everything's there: the appearance of the woman and the birth of her son, how Father fiercely Father tried to protect the child, the Dragon preparing to devour it. Will flips another page.

And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great red dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Will's breath catches in his throat.

For the past few sleepless nights, he entertained the notion that Dolarhyde, confused and dazed from his own faux-falling, may have confused Hannibal for being the Dragon. It's true that the angel didn't go through the fall: he didn't plummet to the ground, or have fire scald his back and burn the wings from his back.

But he *did* have his wings removed. Whether or not he ripped them out himself, Will doesn't want to linger on it too much. But what kind of mindset would someone like Dolarhyde be in for him to do something like that? Would that same mindset allow him to make connections that weren't there?

If he believes himself to be the Dragon, ***to be Satan****, he can't be sane*, he thinks. *Something must be plaguing him*.

A familiar shadow lingers at the foot of the nearby staircase. Will doesn't shrink away from it. He knows who it is before he even raises his head from the book.

"How long have you been standing there?" he asks the shadow.

Moonlight illuminates Hannibal's path into the living room; towards the couch that Will's on. His eyes fall to the book on Will's lap. "Not long," he replies, taking a seat. They're close enough that their shoulders and thighs press together, even though the couch is easily long enough to keep both of them separate.

Hannibal plucks the book from Will's hands, closing it and scrutinising the front. "There have been so many versions of this book," he hums. "All broadly telling the same story, but every single one has slight differences. And yet it's these differences that have humans squabbling among each other."

Will watches closely as Hannibal runs a finger over the embossed front of the book. It isn't long before the fallen places the book to the other side of the couch – out of sight of Will. "Out of all the books in this house," Hannibal says, reaching out to take one of Will's hands in his own, "why has that one grabbed your attention?"

With one of his hands captured, Will's fingers in his free hand fidget with the hem of his sleep-shirt. "The others didn't interest me, I suppose," he answers, keeping his eyes on a stray thread starting to unravel from the bottom of his shirt.

He hears Hannibal hum. "A book like that *is* quite interesting, I suppose." And Hannibal leaves it at that. The night stretches on outside. With the moon perched high in the sky, well above the tops of trees in the nearby forest, it's brilliantly white outside. The house is silent. Floorboards occasionally creak and groan, but the lack of any substantial noise is deafening.

"I think..." Will breathes, "that Dolarhyde thinks you're the Dragon. That when he heard that you had been in the first falling, and that you're someone who...*deceives the whole world*...he assumed he knew who you were."

Hannibal's eyes glisten. A small, barely there smile lifts the corner of his mouth.

"For him to become the Dragon, he will need to kill you." A lump lodges in Will's throat: one that doesn't budge when he swallows. Getting the words out is difficult. They've always been able to understand each other.

Hannibal cards his fingertips through Will's hair. "Michael is keen to kill me because I made his younger siblings aware of free will," he recounts, brushing a stray curl from Will's forehead. "Something I gave Dolarhyde; but as you say, he wants me dead to ascend to something greater."

Will sighs at the feeling of his hair being combed, but something prods at his mind. "Two very strong entities want to kill you," he mumbles. "And you won't be able to fight them if they find you."

"What makes you say that?"

"Because you're a *fallen*, Hannibal," Will sighs. "You're powers are long gone. And it doesn't matter how long you've spent here, *resting* or whatever it is you were doing: you won't be able to fight them when they come."

Even with the minimal light coming in through an uncovered window, Will can make out Hannibal's eyes watching him carefully.

Will glances down to their joined hands. "Do you have any more safe houses?" he asks quietly.

He feels the other's hand stiffen slightly in his grasp. "Yes."

"Where?"

A small sigh leaves Hannibal's nose. "I have two to the west of America. One is in Canada. There is a handful within Europe."

Any of them could work. It's been several days since Dolarhyde has last been seen. Chiyoh, on her frequent trips into town for supplies, hasn't been able to make out if he's still there or not. A general feeling of unrest is still embedded within the town. Local and state police have been in and out, investigating the murder of the Morelli family.

Maybe the presence of police scared him off?

Maybe they've been hiding so well that he's abandoned the hunt and moved on?

Hannibal's thumb brushes over Will's. "I will have to contact someone to see if the houses are still habitable. But if you want to move, we'll move."

Something's laced through those words. Will turns his head, hiding a frown with the shadows of the room. If Hannibal sees it, he doesn't mention it. He merely pats Will's knee and gets up from the couch. "Come back to bed," he gentles, gently tugging Will up from the couch. Hannibal leads them through the dark living room: book long forgotten on the couch.

They make it to the bottom of the staircase before an abrupt spark of bright light flashes into the room. Outside, through one of the windows, they watch as the heavy clouds part and one long beam of light bounds across the sky, aiming straight for the horizon. Hannibal's grip on Will's hand tightens. Once the beam hits the horizon, the sky is sent back into darkness once again.

Will's stomach drops.

An angel.

Snow is due to fall. With the winter months approaching, all the news channels are filled with these days are reports of oncoming snow storms and plummeting temperatures. A light dusting of the stuff already covers the fields surrounding the house.

The car radio is background noise as Will looks out the passenger seat window; watching idly as people from the town pass. Some chat among themselves. Others go about their chores and tasks as mundanely as they usually would. Will's sigh fogs up a piece of the window.

Nothing substantial is happening.

Nothing worth watching for very long, anyway.

He rolls his shoulders and settles back into the passenger seat.

The town feels different.

An angel is nearby. Even without his blessed blood, what washes through his veins now still thrums with energy, sensing that something powerful is nearby. He's sure that the people he's spent the morning watching have no idea what's happening. They continue to mill around as if everything is fine – or as fine as it can be with an investigation going on into a murdered family.

His fingers tap idly against his thigh. Chiyoh's been in the butchers for almost ten minutes. Through the fogged glass of the storefront, he can see her caught up in a conversation with one of the butchers. From the look on her face, he's half-tempted to walk in and help her escape whatever it is they're talking about.

But flashing lights catch his attention. He peers up to the rear-view mirror just in time to watch two police cars pass straight through the town, heading out of it towards a nearby collection of tree-covered hills.

Towards the Morelli house.

A couple of people on the street watch them go too, but instantly get back to whatever it is they're doing as soon as the cars pass.

He stifles a jump when the driver's door opens and Chiyoh slips inside the car. She hands him the back of beef and pork cuts she's gotten for one last meal in the house before they move. As they pull away from the storefronts, and start their journey back to the house, Will speaks up. "Did you see the police cars?"

Chiyoh doesn't take her eyes off the road, but one eyebrow arches slightly. "No?"

Will nods, glancing out at the rolling fields they pass. "State police are here," he says. "They were going to the Morelli house."

At that, Chiyoh sighs heavily. "It's bad enough that Hannibal wants to go sniffing around that house out of *curiosity*, but now you too?"

Will turns. "I didn't say that-"

"-You were thinking it," she huffs. He sees how her grip on the steering wheel tightens slightly. "I thought you were on my side: you managed to convince that stubborn old creature to move on to somewhere else. Now you want to go to that family's house and have a look?"

"*I didn't say that*," Will presses, turning back to look out the window again. Flecks of snow are starting to escape from heavy grey clouds overhead. A storm will hit tonight, the radio said. Not a big one, but snow will be covering the roads in the morning.

Usually, their trips to and from town are quiet. For as long as he's known Chiyoh, the fallen doesn't really speak much to him. She didn't use to speak a lot to Hannibal either; but when it became apparent that Will couldn't hang around with Hannibal for long stretches of time, the other fallen found company in her. Will always assumed that Chiyoh just didn't appreciate the way that he would come in and out of Hannibal's life every couple of decades or so.

But lately, they've all been confiding in each other.

They're almost back at the house before Chiyoh speaks. "We need to move. You said it yourself," she says firmly. "What happened to that family is something that will happen to us if someone like Dolarhyde catches us. And you and Hannibal saw an angel land nearby last night. We can't wait around here much longer."

Will stays silent.

Chiyoh huffs a sigh. "We are *not* going to the Morelli house. Do you understand?"

Chiyoh is the last to get out of the car. With her rifle slung over her shoulder, she wordlessly marches past the two of them as they wait nearby.

The entrance to the Morelli's house is sanctioned off with rows of bright yellow crime-scene tape. Chiyoh catches one strand and lifts it up to duck underneath. Hannibal and Will both follow, starting their small trek up the driveway towards the house. It's a simple, cabin-like two story. A stack of cut lumber sits stacked against the side of the house, covered partially by a tarp. The front door has more tape crossed over it. Chiyoh bends down slightly to slide a dagger from the side of her boot. Hannibal tries to hide a smile as the tape is cut, and Chiyoh picks at the lock.

"Ten minutes," she states firmly, standing to the side and letting the two other fallen into the house. The air inside is heavy. He rubs a hand along his forearm. The blood in his veins starts to hum again. That last strand of connection to his siblings and father is still lingering. Someday soon, it'll snap, and he'll finally be free of them.

But until then, he's trying not to let the odd, numbing, tingling feeling inside him bother him too much.

"An angel has been here," Hannibal hums, looking around at the open-planned downstairs.

Chiyoh suddenly squares her shoulders. "Dolarhyde?" The house is surrounded by woodland. It would be easy for Dolarhyde to stick around, hide among the trees: wait until his prey came to him.

Will shakes his head. “Someone stronger,” he says, rubbing at his forearm again. The thrum only gets stronger. It shakes the walls of his blood vessels. Eventually, his fingertips and toes start to tingle. His heart hammers against the inside of his ribcage.

Hannibal glances at him for a moment, before looking out further into the house. The living room, kitchen, and downstairs are all untouched. Nothing looks out of place. A faint layer of dust has settled along some of the glass surfaces of the coffee table and TV stand, but nothing looks out of the ordinary.

They travel to the bottom of the staircase. On the wooden railing, Will spots faint streaks of blood. An identifiable, large handprint is halfway up the railing, but droplets of blood have run straight down towards the bottom.

Will’s heart quivers. He leads the rest of them upstairs, towards a landing that has a collection of small, white flags dotted around on the floor. The bodies of the family are long gone, carted off by coroners that had been hanging out within the town a couple of days ago. All that remains in the house is the equipment of investigators and the family’s belongings.

A fully furnished house with not a soul living within it is an unsettling sight.

Branching off from the landing are four bedrooms. Each of them has yellow tape crossed in front of the opened doors. As they pass the first door, Will’s stomach drops as he makes out its interior: pale pink walls with shelves stacked full with plush, stuffed animals. A single bed sits pushed against the corner of one wall.

The Morelli’s had three children. Whether or not they were all half-breeds, Will isn’t certain. But the room looks like a normal little girl’s room. He glances down at the toes of his boots, grounding himself. Two other rooms are similar: inhabited once by the other two children. One is decorated sky blue, with action figures and books on shelves, and a heap of clothes scattered haphazardly on the floor. The other is a pale green: an older child, who once had an interest in nature, if the collection of animal posters and prints on the walls were anything to go by.

The parents’ room is the last one they see. It’s the only one that hasn’t been cleaned, Will notices. While the children’s room had been scrubbed clean of blood, splatters of the stuff still stain the headboard and sheets of the bed in the middle of the parent’s room. The blood spatter is along the walls too, with a couple of flecks managing to get on to the ceiling.

Did the father put up a fight, then? Will thinks as he stares at the blood. *A fallen is a weak creature, but he had a family. He needed to protect them from one of his own.*

He jumps at a warm hand cupping his elbow. As he turns, he meets Hannibal’s eyes. The other fallen squeezes his shoulder, before stepping away.

“Five minutes,” Chiyoh says. She’s in the middle of the landing, looking between each of the children’s rooms. There’s no real expression on her face, but Will can feel anger and sorrow thrumming within her.

Will steps over the yellow tape, into the parents' room. The blood splattered about is the only thing of substantial colour. Everything else – the bed frame, walls, curtains, wardrobe – is all a shade of muted brown. On a nearby bedside table, Will spots a small picture frame.

John Morelli and his wife.

Fallen have no defining characteristics. The two people in the photo look like a normal couple. You would never guess that John Morelli had been a fallen. Will looks closer at the picture. It's of them on their wedding day: the couple laughing as handfuls of paper confetti were thrown over them. It's a moment caught in time.

Hannibal has followed him into the room. Where Will seems occupied with the photo, Hannibal moves around behind him, glancing towards the pools of blood still staining the room. "It's strange that the police haven't cleaned it up, yet," he says, regarding the rest of the room for a moment.

"The police are still coming and going," Will answers, numbly placing the picture frame back. He'll leave no prints behind. Angels and fallen don't have them. It's something that resonates within him.

The police won't know that something like Dolarhyde did all of this.

The thrumming within his veins is still going on. It feels like anxiety: something cold and chilling that churns the stomach and quickens the heart. His fingers tap against his thighs. "He was ruthless."

Hannibal hums. "A creature like Dolarhyde would be, I suppose. Especially if he's chasing down an achievement."

Will regards Hannibal for a moment. "This could be you," he gestures to the pool of dried up blood in the middle of the mattress. "This could be you and me if he catches us. If any one of them catches us."

"Why did you want to come here?"

Will bites the inside of his cheek. "I just...wanted to see, I suppose."

Hannibal doesn't respond. He nods – acknowledging that Will has said something – but turns on his heel and wanders back out of the room. Will waits a moment before following. Just as he passes the threshold, the blood in his veins freezes over. Everything within him seizes as the world around him starts to tumble and churn.

His eyelids flicker closed. As the ground beneath him turns, his hand flies out, supporting him as his body suddenly tries to give. He catches the bridge of his nose between his thumb and index finger. A throbbing pain starts building between his eyes.

"Will?" Hannibal bends down to catch his elbow. "Will, are you alright?"

Will pulls his hand away, but the pain continues to grow. A bead of blood trickles from his nose and splashes on to his hand.

“The angel that was here earlier: it’s...it’s still here,” Will breathes, wincing at the pain spreading from his forehead down towards his jaw. Chiyoh nimbly grabs her rifle and cocks it, looking towards a nearby window. The forest outside manages to be darker than the night sky itself. Shadows settle between trees.

Chiyoh stalks towards the top of the staircase. Slowly, Will’s eyelids manage to lift again. Hazel eyes meet his. “The pain. Is it gone?” Hannibal asks quietly.

Will manages a nod.

He gestures for Will to follow. The creep back along the landing, but Will’s hand goes to his waist. Sheathed to his belt buckle is his dagger. It was the last thing he grabbed before leaving their house. He lets his palm fold around the pommel of the dagger, and uses his thumb to unsheathe it slightly.

They file back down the stairs: Chiyoh first, with Hannibal and Will following close behind. It’s a straight journey towards the front door, which Chiyoh had left slightly ajar. The house is deafeningly quiet.

Will’s ears twitch at the sudden sound of a floorboard creaking. The sound comes from the kitchen. The three of them glance at each other before another creak sounds. Chiyoh steps around to stand in front of Hannibal and Will, aiming the rifle towards the kitchen. Even with the downstairs being open-planned, there’s a small hallway leading out of the kitchen to the backyard of the house. A place for something to hide.

Hannibal takes Will’s hand and tugs him towards the door. With his other hand, Hannibal manages to open it without making a sound.

But something catches the corner of Will’s eye.

A figure stalks out of the shadows. An angel. His wings aren’t behind his back, folded in so he could fit into a human costume. A well-tailored suit wraps around him like armour.

The Angel of the Eastern Gate inclines his head towards Will: a greeting. “*Watcher."*

Chapter End Notes

That relatable writer moment when you're trying to bring your story one way, but a character interaction means it starts veering off another way, but you're the boss, so you spend too many days/weeks trying to wrangle the plotline back to where you want it.

Comments & Kudos gladly appreciated!

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There is a stretch of something that exists between the mortal world and that of the other. As long as he's existed, Gabriel has never been able to place a name on to it. It's a strange place. The air around them sizzles with electricity. It's not entirely breathable. But their kind doesn't seem perturbed by it.

Limbo is somewhere similar. It's worse than the mortal world, but it's certainly not hell. It's where time seems to stand stock still, but flickers by too quickly at once. The air is heavy and wispy at the same time. It's an odd place. Not that he would know, of course. He wouldn't set foot in that dreadful place even if he were promised all the riches Father had to offer.

Seven of them gather within that odd strip of realm – away from prying eyes and open ears. The consulate is too open. Too many wandering fledglings pass through it every second. And with the notion that they could leave this world at any moment they choose, he would rather not have to deal with any information being passed on to unfavourables.

Michael is the only one that moves. He stalks around the circle of archangels, hands behind his back. The air feeds off of him. With each huff of breath he hisses from his nose, the air around them snaps and sizzles. "You're my council," he growls, "so *council*."

Beside Gabriel, Uriel steps forward. The archangel is wrapped in his usual grab: a tunic that pools at his feet, shimmering white, just like his eyes. "You're over-thinking this, brother."

Michael finally stops his pacing when he goes to stand in front of the other archangel. Even though they had been all created at once by Father, each of them is slightly different from the last. While Uriel has glowing eyes and a lithe frame, and Azrael is built for his smith-work, Michael, their commander, stands just that bit taller than all of them. "What would you have me do?"

The question is thrown to all of them. The youngest of the seven, Raphael and Azrael, have kept quiet. But glowing, watchful eyes follow the conversation as it's thrown around among each other. They're not much for contributing to these kinds of meetings. Gabriel lifts his chin. He supposes that if they don't contribute, if they don't give Michael any ideas that could result in harm or worse, like Father's wrath, then they are absolved of all faults.

Gabriel finds himself smirking. *It's clever*.

All the while, a leering grin has taken over Uriel's face. "We all seem to seek the same thing: the drake and the Dragon." Uriel turns to the other archangels. "And the drake seems to want the Dragon, too."

Michael regards the other archangel for a moment. Even though his eyes don't glow like the other's, they're still terrifying in their gaze. "You would have me align with that which we

seek to kill?"

Uriel nods over towards Gabriel. "Some of us have heard whispers on the drake's whereabouts."

Gabriel stiffens. Although one can go through an entire meeting without uttering so much as a word, it's difficult to do that when another brother seems keen on throwing you to the hounds. Michael's gaze turns heard. "When did you receive these messages, brother?"

The other archangel squares his shoulders. "They were whispers, Michael. Nothing more. I couldn't come to you with rumours and hearsay." He's lived alongside Michael for too long to be threatened by him.

However, Michael does stalk over to him. His movements are slow, but purposeful: like a lion squaring up to his prey. "But could your birds find out?" his voice has lowered in tone. But it doesn't stop the snap of electricity around them.

Gabriel sets his jaw, and nods.

"Find him for me." Michael's voice is a touch softer now. He's learned over the millennia that a lilting voice can convince any of them to do just about anything. Michael's shoulders square. "We will do what Uriel suggests, then. Find that drake for me. Let him lead us to our Dragon."

He glances around the space. Gabriel's eyes follow. What he sees is his other brothers wearing a uniformed, leering smirk. "When the time is right," Michael suddenly growls, "kill them both."

It's a dismissal. Raphael and Azrael step away from their congregation. As the slink away, hoping not to be called back by their eldest brother, Gabriel chews the inside of his cheek. Uriel turns and disappears into the other realms. Barachiel leaves too. Each slips into the light with a flutter of wings before it's just Michael and Gabriel standing within the space.

"What about the Watcher?" The words fall out of Gabriel's mouth before he has a chance to snap it shut. His conversations with his younger brother still lilt within his mind. He's been sorting through each meeting he had with the young fallen: checking and rechecking to see if something of interest managed to slip out.

Michael rounds on his heel. "What of him?" the words are venomous. It's a sore wound: Michael letting that Watcher slip from his grasp. It's a wound that hasn't quite closed up yet.

Gabriel tilts his head. "What would you do to him, if you found him?"

Michael stalks over. The other tries not to move backwards. He lifts his chin as Michael comes to a stop in front of him. Uncomfortably close, he feels the puff of warm air against his ear when Michael hisses: "I would make him watch."

Will is still injured. He's still weak and in the throes of a metamorphosis.

That's why Hannibal's arm shoots out in front of him, and he's moved to hide behind the older fallen. Chiyoh cocks her rifle and aims it at the angel's head. Mortal guns are useless against angels. Will has seen too many farmers and civilians try and shoot angels down. Bullets reflect off of skin as if they were made of metal.

But she's always kept her rifle close; even when she stalked around the land of the house looking for Dolarhyde.

Chiyoh keeps the barrel of her gun trained on the Angel's head. Will blinks. Bullets encased in *adamas* metal – something that could absolutely pierce through the skin of angels.

Not once did he consider that she may have smithed her own bullets.

But the Angel doesn't think so either. He looks perfectly calm. "You seek Dolarhyde, correct?"

Will tries to stop the shiver that tries to rattle up his spine. The Angel always had a sort of voice that reminded him of Michael's: harsh and commanding. Even now, feet firmly on mortal ground, Will can feel the ghosting touch of the archangel's hand around his throat. He remembers the fall—

Chiyoh growls lowly in her throat. "So do you, it seems." The rifle remains perfectly still. Her hands don't quake.

The Angel regards their small group for a moment. "Michael would have the betrayer killed," he says slowly, eyes moving over Chiyoh and Hannibal's shoulders, staring straight at Will.

He swallows a lump trying to lodge itself within his throat. "Michael would have *us* killed," he manages. "You were the one to bring me to him. *You* dragged me into that consulate and let him do what he wanted. *You didn't seem the slightest bit concerned as he threw me over the edge*."

Pressed to Hannibal's back, he can feel a growl rumbling through the other's chest. He can only imagine the number of falls he's witnessed through his lifetime of being earthbound. But not once has he experienced the falling of a loved one. Will's fall affected him. He keeps the other man that bit close to his side when they go out walking. He's shielding Will from a potential danger with his own body.

Will swallows again. He can only imagine the rage that's boiling the blood of Hannibal's veins knowing that it was the Angel who damned him.

The Angel sets his jaw. "Gabriel heard whispers that a family had been murdered outside of Baltimore," he begins, turning his attention back to the gun pointed at him. "It was nothing of interest for a time. Humans are quite fond of causing harm to each other: who are we to

interfere. But, Gabriel's birds listened and watched police guards come and go. They heard about how badly those bodies were savaged. So Gabriel sent me down to investigate."

Will's fingers fidget by his side. "So you found him then? Dolarhyde?"

The Angel doesn't answer. His eyes – a familiar dark brown – just stare straight back at him.

The silence within the room is deafening. "Why haven't you attacked us yet?" Will breathes. The air around them turns rancid. "Why haven't more of your siblings filled this house?"

At that, the Angel takes a step forward. Chiyoh lifts the gun slightly, adjusting her aim. The bullet already loaded inside clicks. The sound is deafening within the silence of the room. The Angel stops. Whether it's of his own accord, or the dawning on him that maybe, just maybe, Chiyoh has made her own bullets capable of killing him, Will isn't sure. But he keeps looking at the Angel.

Something flashes across his face: something that looks dangerously like emotion. "Gabriel wanted me to pass on a message," he says. The volume of his voice has dropped to that of a mumble. Will's eyes go to the room's windows. Its pitch black outside, but he imagines dozens of lark eyes staring back in at him from the darkness. "Michael would see you both killed," he nods to Will and Hannibal. "Alongside Dolarhyde."

"Michael blames me for the falling of many angels," Hannibal speaks. "It would make sense for him to rip out the weed at its source."

And apart from Dolarhyde, who is a separate issue altogether, Will is probably the most well-known *victim* of Hannibal's manipulations. Will had been dragged in front of the consulate, offered a trial, and spat in the face of the Most High and Nobel Commander.

The Angel swallows. "Gabriel wants you to know that the archangels are planning something: Uriel and Barachiel are here. Michael wants to ally himself with the drake for the time being."

Will's frown only deepens. Michael has never allied himself with anything in the entirety of his existence.

"Dolarhyde is fuelled by something that blocks his judgement," the Angel says, glancing between each of the fallen on the other side of the room. "My older brothers will offer their help to him to find you, and Dolarhyde will accept: if only to get an opportunity to kill two archangels once he's done."

Will's shoulders square. Killing two archangels will ignite a war. Michael hasn't been earth-bound since the beginning of time; but something like that would draw his attention. He wouldn't leave until everything was put back right.

Dolarhyde wants to kill Michael, his mind supplies. *The idiot: he thinks he can take on the commander—*

His grip has tightened around the handle of his blade. A movement that the Angel has noticed. An almost tired sounding sigh escapes his nose. “You have no reason to trust me, Watcher. I know that. But I need you to understand that Gabriel wants you to be safe.”

“If you say that three of your brothers are trying to gain Dolarhyde’s favour,” Chiyoh says lowly, “and that they’ll only turn on him once we’re disposed of: what’s to say that you aren’t doing the same to us?”

The Angel catches the bridge of his nose between his fingers. “Gabriel is incapable of lying,” he presses.

“Gabriel is easily led,” Hannibal corrects. The nightmares. The messages passed to Will in his sleep. They all had Gabriel’s voice, but Michael’s words. The voice of the consulate – the voice of all of them – has no mind for himself.

The Angel sighs. His eyes have dimmed. The light that usually flickers within them, one of the many things that indicates him as a blessed creature, softens. “You have no reason to believe me, or to trust me. I understand. But I care for your well-being, little brother. As does Gabriel.”

The corner of Will’s lip lifts into a snarl. “You threw me at the consulate’s feet,” he mutters. “You didn’t even budge when Michael dragged me out of that hall.”

“I brought you to the consul to get them to help you,” the Angel protests, taking a measured step forward. Chiyoh keeps the barrel of the gun trained between his eyes. “I heard that you had been lured into that creature’s bed. Your soul would have been lost-”

Will growls, a guttural sound low in his throat. “He didn’t *lure* me anywhere. I went willingly.” He steps forward, moving Hannibal slightly out of the way. Before the other fallen can protest, Will presses on. “I didn’t want to work for the consulate anymore. A couple of millennia spent doing what I used to do will change someone. I won’t stand here and say that some of them didn’t deserve it. The bad fallen, the ones who had a black, withering void in their chests: they didn’t belong here. But the ones with new, prospering lives? The ones with families? With *children*?” Will scoffs. “They had found happiness. And who was I to take it from them.”

The Angel lowers his gaze. Faintly, Will can see him start to gnaw at the inside of his cheek. “Run,” he says firmly, “run far away from here. Go somewhere where no one will be able to see you.” He glances to each of them. “That’s Gabriel’s final message to you.”

Then, he backs away. Chiyoh makes no move to fire her gun, but does keep it on the Angel. With every measured step that he takes backwards, the light returns to his eyes. “I won’t tell Michael that I found you,” he says, finally turning to walk towards the back door of the house. When the Angel leaves, the house heaves out a sigh that it seemed to have been holding. The air around them becomes breathable again. Will’s fingers fidget by his side. They stop when Hannibal’s interlinks with them.

“We need to leave,” he gentles, keeping close to Will’s side.

Chiyoh doesn't lower the gun. She's the last to leave the house, only turning her back once she's sure that the Angel doesn't seem too interested in following them. Their car is parked at the bottom of the driveway.

Hannibal, with one firm hand on Will's lower back, leads him into the back. As soon as his door closes, Will draws in a gasp of air. His lungs ache. There's a trembling feeling within his fingers, even as he tries to lock them together. The air he sucks in is too light and thin. Just as he draws one breath inwards, he needs to expel it.

A hand is suddenly between his shoulder blades: between his wounds.

"Breathe," a calming voice instructs. "Just breathe. Like this."

He glances over. Hannibal has gotten into the other side of the back. He has leaned over Will slightly, but still with enough space between them. Just over his shoulder, Will can see clouds pass. Occasionally, telephone posts do too. Chiyoh has pulled away from the house, then.

And Will tries. Each lungful of air he tries to cling on to just gets caught in his throat. His fingers start to go numb. His toes follow not long after. It's a tingling feeling that steadily crawls its way up through his limbs. Inside his chest, his heart beats faster and faster until it's knocking against the walls of his ribcage.

"Will," the voice is back again. It has hardened slightly. "You're going to have a panic attack. I need you to breathe for me."

"They're going to find us," Will gasps. The words barely manage to escape his mouth. "We can't go anywhere. They'll find us."

Underneath his feet, he can feel the car start to slow down. He doesn't have to lift his head to know that Chiyoh has diverted them off of the road and on to a hard shoulder.

"We can hide, Will," Hannibal gentles. Although blood rushes through his ears, the other fallen's voice manages to break through. "There are places in this world that they won't be able to find-"

"-It doesn't matter!" Will gasps. His hands and feet are numb. His fingers begin to cramp, curling into his fist. His arms follow: turning into his chest. "If Michael comes—"

He'll kill us all.

The idea of the commander coming – wrapped in battle-scarred, but gleaming, armour with a longsword brandished in his hand – sends jolts of cold and sharp fear through his blood.

Something that doesn't warm, no matter how close Hannibal sidles up next to him. He can still feel the other fallen by his side: their thighs are pressed together, as are their arms. Hannibal has a solid and firm hand between Will's shoulders.

But it all starts to slip away. Darkness creeps in as his vision starts to blur.

“Will, I’m here,” Hannibal’s voice is lost amid the sound of blood rushing through his ears. It sounds like an ocean swallowing him whole.

“Did you find them, then?”

The Angel lowers his gaze. The archangel in front of him already knows. He doesn’t need to voice an answer. But, still, the archangel needs to hear his younger brother say so. *You wouldn’t lie to me, would you little brother?*

The Angel shakes his head at the unasked question. “I found them,” he answers.

The archangel regards him for a moment. “And did you tell them what I told you?”

The Angel nods.

Gabriel looses a small sigh. “Good.” He looks back out at the city. Baltimore. It’s a peculiar place. Then again, all man-made places on this plain are odd to him. They’re perched on the roof of a building within the centre of the city: where most of his larks are. They’ve found all sorts of things since landing here: most noticeably, fresh fallen.

It has been a long while since Michael lost his temper. He has seen a couple of fallen for himself already. Even with the time that has passed, they still seem to be struggling to adapt to their new bodies and lives. He arched an eyebrow at one still dressed in a tattered hospital gown wandering down the street: two long lines of blood streaming down from his back.

Don’t bother with those ones, he had told his larks. *They’re not the ones I need.*

The Angel looks up towards the sky. “I take it that none of the consulate know what you’re doing, correct?”

Gabriel doesn’t even grace the Angel with an acknowledgement. Of course they don’t. His younger brothers – Raphael and Azrael – probably couldn’t care less. But Michael? Bless Father’s name, but if Michael knew what he was doing—

One of his larks flutters up to the roof. He’s a young angel – feathers newly plumed and coloured in a rich red roan. His wings twitch, steadying himself on the edge of the building’s roof. The lark bows his head.

Gabriel regards him with an arched eyebrow. *Have you any news for me, lark?*

Uriel and Barachiel have found the drake, brother.

The Angel lowers his eyes to the ground. Gabriel's nose wrinkles. Of course they have found him that quickly. The efficiency of his larks is something he preens: but *fuck* could it be annoying sometimes. Gabriel waves his hand in dismissal. With a swift beat of wings, the lark leaves.

With two archangels helping the drake, he'll be a formidable opponent. If they don't hold a tight leash on that creature, it could be devastating. But it's Barachiel and Uriel: snakes that are always coiled within the grass. If any of the seven of them could harbour such tenacity and cunning, it's his two brothers.

The Angel shuffles his weight from foot to foot. "How long do you think you can keep all of this hidden from them?" The question is quiet: as though Michael stood listening over their shoulders.

The archangel sighs – or emits a sound similar enough to one. "Long enough," he replies curtly. He is Father's messenger. Every word that is uttered among the plains and those within it must pass his ears first. Everything Michael knows – everything they all know – comes from him. He can play this game for as long as he likes. Granted, of course, that the other two brothers don't happen to stumble across his Watcher or his mate.

It was lucky that they were even in that house at all. But, for all that he doesn't know about the Dragon, Gabriel does know that he covets curiosity. He would have eventually wandered up to that house: it was only a matter of waiting it out.

The Angel bristles. The winds are changing. The cold bites at their wings, chilling their feathers and ruffling them. Gabriel allows his to stretch, unfurling in a spread of tawny plumage. They're not as grand as the others, but they still serve their purpose. The Angel does the same, shaking off the chill. "If Michael asks for your assistance," Gabriel says, "you will give it to him. If he asks you any questions, you will answer them. But you are not to divulge any of our secrets to him. Understood?"

Lying to an archangel. Blasphemous.

But not following the direct order of one?

Gabriel glowers at the Angel. *It's not blasphemy if you're following **my** orders. They just don't happen to fall in line with those of my brother.*

"So when the commander comes for my wings, or my head," he retorts, "am I to take the sole blame? Or am I in a position to drag you down with me?"

The Angel cocks his head. "Can an archangel lose their wings? Is that even possible? Would the consulate be able to function without its messenger?"

You are a principality, Gabriel growls lowly in his throat. *You will do as I command.*

There's enough venom in the projection to make the Angel's eyes lower to the ground.

Will doesn't wake for the packing up off their stuff in the house. Truthfully, they don't own much to begin with. The house, under Hannibal's name, will fall back into emptiness: cared for by a nameless and silent carer, making sure that if Hannibal were to ever need it again, it would be useable. What they do bring is a collection necessities: clothes, blankets, toiletries. Chiyoh manages to grab the last of the food they had within the cupboards and the fridge. It isn't much, but it should last them two or three days: long enough to get to another of Hannibal's houses.

All of them have been used at one point or another. The path between each of them is embedded within his mind. Even with the night sky stretched out over them, and the minimal amount of light coming from the moon, he's able to direct her towards a highway.

Hannibal routinely looks up to the rear-view mirror. Or else, he peers over his shoulder to the sleeping fallen curled up in the backseat. With a rolled up blanket beneath his head, and one stretched over his body, Will continues to sleep.

Chiyoh glances over at Hannibal. She returns her gaze to the road. "I told you he was going to bring trouble," she almost laments, tightening her grip on the steering wheel. "From the moment he stepped into the atrium of that gaudy villa you had in Rome, I *knew* he was going to bring the world to an end."

Hannibal can't stop the glint that flickers in his eye. "One could argue that that is why I fell for him in the first place."

Chiyoh clicks her tongue. "Why couldn't you have fallen for a human instead? Much less difficult to deal with."

"We both know that humans can be just as difficult, if not more so, than us," he says, taking another quick checking-look at Will. He'll sleep through the night. The panic itself wasn't enough to knock him out.

Hannibal sighs. "And humans are finite things. They wither and die away, and the winds are always sweeping another one in as soon as the last one leaves. I have too much time on my hands, *mano meile*. As do you. I don't want to spend it constantly looking for companionship."

Chiyoh arches an eyebrow. "You won't be able to spend eternity together if Michael gets his hands on you," she takes a quick glance over at him again. "You realise that, yes?"

"Michael won't find us."

Even with her eyes back on the road, they narrow. "You seem awfully sure about that."

There's a lengthy, pregnant pause that falls between the two of them. "Suppose I entertain the idea that what Gabriel says is true: Michael wants to ally himself with Dolarhyde, and he has

two of his consulate helping to find us. If we are found by them, it would be an opportunity to rid ourselves of a multitude of problems."

Chiyoh sighs. "No one has ever killed an archangel before."

"Are you certain about that?"

"The Morning-Star doesn't count."

"I would argue that he does."

Chiyoh huffs. "Killing an archangel would do more harm than good, and you know that. Killing two of Michael's brothers will just draw him out. If Dolarhyde kills him, then Heaven is without a leader. Chaos will erupt. If we kill Dolarhyde, then the two archangels he would have brought with him will bring all of us to Michael personally: and we die."

Another moment of quiet falls over them.

"And we can't keep running forever," she continues: albeit, much quieter than before. "Another Watcher will come along, and this one won't have the heart of your mate."

The words have a short sting at Hannibal's heart. He glances up to the rearview mirror. Will snuffles slightly in his sleep, curling in on himself. His wounds should be healed just enough to not rip apart by the movement. He grasps the blanket in a loose hold but brings a wad of it close to his nose.

Hannibal's chest swells. "We'll deal with everything when the opportunity arises."

Chapter End Notes

I'm desperately trying to rein this story back in lol

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

I'm back! So sorry about the wait. Work started to get busy again and well, you know.

Here we are! Shit has been slowly advancing towards the fan, but now...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will wakes to the sharp sting of salt in his nostrils. His eyelids flicker open just as the car's engine is turned off. Distantly, he can make out the shrill cawing of both crows and gulls. Slumped against the car door, he can barely lift his head to make out where they are. By the sea, he can only presume. If he strains his ears just enough, he can hear the crashing of waves against rocks.

The car shifts as the front doors are opened and those occupying the front step out. *Hannibal*. Will peers out from the crook of his arm. The fallen stands still for a moment, observing his surroundings. But even with the sun beginning to set, the light is still too much.

He buries his head into the crook of his arm. Sleep almost comes back for him before he can feel the trunk of the car being opened. Chiyoh hoists their bags out, leaving the heavier of them by the car, while she stalks off.

He blinks. A glass house, perched on a cliff overlooking the ocean. A flock of gulls glide past and make a dive for the churning waters below, eager to catch the last of the fish before the evening tides take them into deep ocean. Will's eyes take a moment to focus, but after a moment, he manages to make out his surroundings more clearly.

The door on the other side of the car opens.

Hannibal peers into the car. "I thought I was going to have to carry you inside."

Will offers a small grin. "Wouldn't have been the first time."

Hannibal offers a hand. "Come," he says, easing Will out of the car. As soon as he's out in the open, the sting of salt gets harsher. Though, it's not entirely unpleasant. Afterimages of nights spent wandering up and down the beaches of the Amalfi all those centuries ago flicker before him. Almost as quickly as they appear, they flutter away.

Hannibal's fingers lace with his. "Is everything alright, my love?"

A redundant question, especially now. "Yeah," is all Will manages to get out.

Of all the places where they've met or crossed paths, he doesn't remember this one. A recent addition then. Will can see the point in collecting new hideaways; even if Gabriel and the others are unable to find them, it's still important to have a network of new places to flee and hide, just in case a trial is picked up.

Chiyoh finishes stripping the last of the plastic covers from the furniture. As Will looks around the living room and the adjoining kitchen, he arches a brow. This was definably used before. An energy sits just above the furnishings of the rooms. Will blinks. It doesn't feel like an empty house, devoid of any presence.

"You've been here recently," Will breathes. It's not a question, but Hannibal answers it with a curt nod all the same. With every step Will takes further into the house, warmth spreads through his body.

"A year ago," Hannibal answers after a moment. Chiyoh retreats down a hallway; presumably to uncloak the rest of the house. Will takes a few minutes to run his eyes over the furnishings and a piano that sits framed by two glass walls. For a hideaway, it's remarkably exposed.

Hannibal follows. "I was here with a charge," he continues after a time; either realising that Will wasn't going to ask *who with* or that he thought the other should know anyway.

Will glances over his shoulder. "Another fallen?"

"A nephilim."

That makes Will stop. It's a long, silent moment before he speaks again. "One of yours?"

Something akin to a smile shadows Hannibal's face. "Not biologically."

He should have known. Even with the gaps of time separating them, he knows that Hannibal wouldn't be as reckless to sire a child. Especially a nephilim. Will almost winces at the onslaught of memories that the word brings; *half-breed, mutt, mongrel, thing*. They can be such meek little things. Or vicious. A study had been conducted a few years back, examining the feral nature of nephilim. Some children as they grew older began to lash out at their family and peers. A small minority went as far as murder. But then Will has seen nephilim too shy to utter a single word. They keep their heads low, eyes locked on the ground. Which one did Hannibal have?

He doesn't press why she isn't here. Maybe in another location. Maybe dead. Still, Will bites his tongue and keeps examining the house. Hannibal follows him throughout, always a couple of steps behind. The house is sprawling. Even though it doesn't look like it from the outside, rooms and hallways sprawl on for what seems like miles. Rooms are sparsely decorated or furnished, with only the bare necessities inside. It's such a stark contrast to Hannibal's Baltimore home. Many of the walls of the house are floor to ceiling windows. Will stops by one of the bedrooms. It's Hannibal's; or, the one he takes when he stays here. Even with no one being within the house for a long time, the bed looks remarkably comfy and neatly made. The pillows are still fluffed and propped up against the headboard.

“Would you like to rest, my love?”

Will shakes his head. He’s not sure how long they’ve been on the road, as he spent most of it asleep. But his muscles are slack and rested, and for the first time in a long time, he doesn’t feel tired.

Instead, Will turns, taking Hannibal’s hand. His skin is so warm. Angels have a tendency to run hot. Heavily fire coursing through their veins, and all that. And even though neither of them has their wings anymore, some last spark of fire still keeps them not quite human. He pulls Hannibal to him. “I’m alright,” he says, winding an arm around the other’s shoulders. Hannibal goes easily, letting Will pull him closer and closer until their chests press together. “I heard you and Chiyoh talking in the car,” Will mumbles, pressing the words into the cashmere of Hannibal’s sweater. “Running and hiding for the rest of our very long lives,” he sighs, “it sounds exhausting.”

Hannibal chuckles. “Our elders and superiors are thorough with their searches.”

Will hums. “They could never find you, though.”

“A combination of never spending too long in one place and having several residences around the world.” Will’s eyes slip shut as long fingers start to comb through his curls. A hum rumbles through his chest. “You have evaded them too, my love. All that’s different now is that we may stay together.”

And it’s a lovely thought. Throughout the millennia, quick and hidden affairs with each other, then spirited away by the night sky as the morning chased it away. But now, he can stay in Hannibal’s bed when the sun starts to peek over the horizon. He can let Hannibal hold him for hours, unperturbed by the idea that someone somewhere could be watching them from above. It’s lovely enough of an idea to almost chase away the panic of them potentially never being truly left alone.

Hannibal presses a kiss to Will’s crown. “Let me feed you,” he says, brushing Will’s hair away from his face. “Let me take care of you.”

Dinner is made a couple of hours later. It’s as simple as it can be with Hannibal involved. Where the food comes from, Will doesn’t ask. Lemon and herb grilled chicken and roasted potatoes are simply placed in the centre of the dining table, and they all take their share.

Chiyoh is as quiet as always, eating as much as she’s able, as quickly as she can, before asking to be excused. Will watches her step away from the table.

“What’s your plan then?” Will asks after a time. Their meal is almost over, some last pieces of potato and gravy remain.

Hannibal arches an eyebrow.

“You said that killing an archangel is possible,” Will continues. In all the time where he has existed, an archangel has never died. He can still remember grooves and brandishing marks on the plates of Michael’s armour from wars past; scars, reminding everyone else, and

himself, that he would win. And his skin would always be unmarred and unblemished. But Michael is the best of them – a commander of an entire legion. One that could be called upon in an instant if anyone so much as raised a finger to their commander.

Hannibal nods. “It can,” he says simply. In all the time where Will has been alive, Hannibal had been considered old. He existed at the making of the world; one of Father’s Firsts. He was there long before there even was a snake in the Garden, whispering temptations into the ear of a woman who didn’t know any better. So maybe, in the time before time, it may have been possible for an archangel’s wings to be clipped. *Lucifer* is the name that pops into Will’s head.

The other fallen sets his cutlery down. “You still have your blade,” Hannibal continues, “and I can hex the house. Prevent any wandering eyes from peering in through the cracks.”

Will swallows the last of his dinner. “Hexing?” His eyebrows rise.

Hannibal nods to one of the glass-panelled walls. It looks out on to a small courtyard, framed by tended-to plants and flowers. Several large rocks mark the property line, and as Will squints, he can make out the faint etching of markings in the stones’ faces.

Runes.

“I hex every house I own and stay in,” Hannibal explains. “Just in case any young fledgling tries their hand at smiting a demon.”

Will’s brow creases in a frown. “You’re not a demon,” he says, placing his own knife and fork down. With the rest of their dinner forgotten about, Will presses on. “But hexing; I didn’t know that that was your style.”

“I do whatever I can to ensure that I’m safe.” Hannibal lifts his chin. “And to ensure the safety of those I care about.”

Fallen aren’t entirely helpless. When they overcome the physical toll of their wounds, they start using their minds. They can be slippery things, fallen. They can arm themselves with old magic; cloaking themselves from searching eyes.

Hannibal stands from the table. “There are ways of clipping an archangel’s wings,” he says, taking both of their plates from the table. As Will fidgets with the base of his wine glass, Hannibal wanders over to the kitchen. Because of the open planned nature of the entire house, he continues their conversation. “You still have your blade,” he explains, “as do I.”

Will’s eyes narrow. “Hidden beneath a floorboard, is it?” he prods. Like all angels, Hannibal had been armed. If he can remember properly, Hannibal’s blade had been a finely crafted sabre, branded with inscriptions and forged in heavenly fire. He’s never seen the other fallen unsheathe it. But Hannibal wouldn’t be as careless as to have it lying about.

“Don’t worry about it, Will,” Hannibal says softly, stacking the last of their dishes into the dishwasher. “Just focus on getting your strength back.”

Francis scents the air. The house is still. Even the trees outside don't dare to budge in the sweeping wind. He prowls through the shadows, scanning his eyes over furnishings and bodies.

The Blackthornes. A kill he didn't commit himself. Blood still pools around each body he passes, seeping into and staining the lush white carpet.

This isn't what we are to help you with, a growl hisses over his shoulder. Francis' lip curls. *This isn't what we need found*.

A voice over his shoulder and a pair of eyes following his movements don't leave him alone. Francis emits his own low growl. "You said that you would aid me in my search for the Dragon," he whispers, as if the bodies scattered by his feet would overhear, "and this is my search."

A fallen sits in a corner, back pressed up against the joint of the room. Francis straightens. He isn't sure if the fallen sees his escorts, o can hear their whispers. But the creature buries his face in his hands and rocks himself back and forth. Francis' teeth gentle. "Brother," but he can't lose the growl, "stand."

The fallen peers through his blood-stained fingers. Eyes, mostly the whites, stare back at him.

"You're free now brother," Francis breathes. "Stand."

This is not what we're helping you with, Uriel glares. The archangel turns to the thing cowering in the corner. *Of what use does this thing offer?*

Francis' teeth sharpen. "Help me eradicate, brother." The fallen's hands slip away from his face. Two large smudges of blood remain splattered against his cheeks and forehead. "Humans are enslaving our kind. Our brothers have been shackled for too long." Francis prowls forward. "Do you want to know the worst thing about that?" He lowers himself down on one knee. The fallen presses his back further into the join of the room. Francis reaches out, laying a large but gentle hand on the creature's knee. "Our own brothers are behind it," he whispers. The archangels glance at each other, sharing a warning look. Barachiel's hand drifts to the pommel of his sword.

Francis sighs: a long and breathy thing. "A serpent has betrayed us; sold us as livestock to Father's favourite creatures."

The fallen blinks. Francis tilts his head. The thing's wrists are black and blue with bruises that even the blood running through their veins wouldn't be able to heal. Moonlight

highlights an unnaturally gaunt face; all cheek and temple bones, and a sharp chin that sticks out through a sheer stretch of skin.

“Help me kill a dragon,” Francis says, trying to soften his words. “And then we can deal with those who had the gall to shackle us.”

Barachiel’s hand slips from his sword’s pommel.

Let us speak plainly, brother, Uriel leans to his brother’s shoulder, keeping his unmoving lips close to Barachiel’s ear. Their companion is blocked out from their words with a single lift of Uriel’s hand. *If he continues to gather more of these faulty creatures, we’ll have another culling on our hands*.

Barachiel lifts his chin. *Michael doesn’t seem that bothered*.

Michael would burn them all if it meant that the ashes would stay still, Uriel scoffs. They continue to watch their charge slowly lure the blood-stained, shaking fallen to his feet.

Barachiel hums. *If it comes to it, brother,* he murmurs, *what is another handful of dead fallen*?

Will feels like he’s sinking. As soon as he lies down in bed, the almost too-soft mattress gives way and morphs around his body. The sheets pool around his waist. His ears twitch at the sound of Hannibal still moving about within the house. Chiyoh is in a nearby bedroom, long since turned in for the night.

Alone with his thoughts, Will stares up at the ceiling. Large lancet windows look out on to the courtyard to the back of the house, but Will pulled the curtains almost an hour ago. Who knows what could linger within the darkness, watching.

He’s almost asleep when Hannibal finally slips into the room. “Did I wake you?” he asks, probably noting how heavy Will’s eyelids have become.

He shakes his head. “Couldn’t sleep without you here,” he mumbles from his nest of pillows and blankets. He’s tired; he knows that because the truth easily slips out of loosened lips. They’ve always shared some dependency on each other. No matter the time or distance separating them, one would always find their way back to the other. It’s only amplified in the past few weeks.

A soft smile spreads over Hannibal’s lips.

It’s only until Hannibal is perched on the other side of the bed does Will realise that there is something in his hands.

With as much energy as he can muster up, he rolls on to his side. “What’s that?”

Hannibal shifts slightly, allowing Will a look at his lap. Balanced over his thighs is a leather sheath, with a brandished hilt peaking out of the top of it. Will frowns, suddenly more awake and aware. “Is...Is that...?”

Hannibal’s long fingers wrap firmly around the blade’s hilt and, with a single, flowing movement, pulls out a shining, gleaming sword. Even in the faint moonlight peering into the room, Will can make out the inscription etched along the length of the blade. He looses a breath. “You kept it?”

Hannibal hums. “When I came to after falling from Father’s grace, I thought that I had lost it.” Will knows the story. Fallings are traumatic. Belongings like armour, clothing, and weapons can be scattered to the four winds during the plummet. He crawls closer to Hannibal. “But after a couple of hours of trekking through the sand dunes, I found it buried in the ground.”

Hannibal runs his fingers along the metal blade. “I thought it would burn me. It’s still a blessed thing. But I let my fingers wrap around the pommel and...”

Will runs a hand up Hannibal’s back. Soothing. He’s never pried into Hannibal’s fall. It was one of the firsts, and that’s all he knew for a time. All he knows now came to him in dribs and drabs in the past millennia. Will lifts himself up, sitting close to Hannibal and perching his chin over his shoulder. The blade still gleams up at its master, ready to be wielded. It hasn’t seen a battle in a long time.

A long sigh leaves Hannibal. “I’m glad to still have it,” he says, sheathing it again. He sets it off to the side, turning his head to brush his nose against Will’s cheek. “I’m not letting harm befall you again.”

Will clicks his tongue. “What happened in the consulate wasn’t your fault,” he mumbles assumingly. His eyelids droop closed as Hannibal presses a chaste kiss to Will’s cheek. “I invited my own destruction.”

Hannibal hums. “That’s not to say that I had no part to play in it.”

Will’s fingers card through the other’s hair. “And I don’t regret a second of it,” he gentles, catching Hannibal’s chin between two fingers and kissing him fiercely.

Hannibal goes easily. Will tugs him back on to the bed, cradling him to his body through two spread thighs. Gentle hands trail up Will’s sides. “I’m going to be honest,” Will breathes, tilting his head to let the fallen run his lips over the tendons of Will’s neck. “Knowing that Michael knows what we did, it gives me joy.”

A warm huff of laughter blows over Will’s neck. “I never pegged you as an exhibitionist.”

“No, none of that.” A sudden gasp is pulled from Will’s throat as Hannibal’s teeth sharpen and nip. “I just wanted him to know how much I didn’t care for him or his kind anymore.”

Hannibal rolls their hips together; earning another gasp from the body below him. “You may as well have invited him into our room, then.”

“I’m pretty sure having Michael’s sour scowling face watch us fuck would have killed the mood instantly.”

“But the point would have been made pretty clear, nonetheless.”

Will winds fingers through Hannibal’s fine hair. He tugs. “Michael is *not* invited into our room,” he growls, wrapping his legs around Hannibal’s hips. With a coordinated effort, sleep shirts and flannel pants are tossed into various corners of the room without much care. Will splays his hands over the expanse of Hannibal’s back. Two raised and mottled scars greet him, but so does lean yet strong muscle that ripples with each movement.

They’ve lain together in the past; before Will’s fall. Quick, muffled things during the darkest nights that would be spirited away by the dawn. Hannibal lifts his head, and looks at Will with such intensity, the other almost flinches.

“The most beautiful creature I’ve ever seen,” Hannibal breathes, running fingertips lightly over Will’s cheek, “laid out below me.”

Warmth blooms across Will’s face. He grabs the other and pulls them into a deep, long kiss; one that’s deep enough to rob them both of air.

“Please tell me that you have stuff here,” Will manages to get out when they part. He almost regrets the words. As soon as they’re spoken into life and Hannibal registers them, the fallen above him leans over to a nightstand on one side of the bed. Without being completely covered, chilled air nips Will’s skin.

But Hannibal returns just as quickly as he left; uncapping a small bottle of lube and letting his fingers circle Will, teasing and light.

Will growls. “Don’t you dare tease me.”

“We have all the time in the world now, my love.” With the others knowing exactly what we get up to, who are we to hide and rush?” Some form of mercy must sit in the cavern of Hannibal’s chest, as two fingers delve into Will’s warmth. His body knows Hannibal. It knows his touch. Without much coaxing, it yields and slackens and loosens; and the fire in Will’s core only crawls throughout the rest of his body.

“Come on,” Will pleads, placing his lips against Hannibal’s plus point, faintly delighted to find it racing.

After a moment, Hannibal’s fingers leave him, but his cockhead quickly replaces. As Hannibal pushes in, twin sounds of pleasure leave them; gasps and moans intermingled with each other’s names. The world around them freezes. Even though it had only been a few weeks since last sleeping together, this can’t compare. Will’s body, although now changed, parts easily for him. Hannibal almost purrs as the other moans against his neck, letting his fingernails dig and scrap against the skin of his back.

Hannibal brushes some of Will's hair from his brow, now slick with sweat. "My love," he breathes. All the millennia spent on this earth, and the creature below him is the only thing to ignite a spark of *something* within him. And it's all-encompassing. Flames of desire engulf his entire being. His hips roll, forwards and back in a steady rhythm. The sound of their bodies colliding is loud in an otherwise silent room. The bed, Will notes, doesn't have a headboard – nothing to cling on to, as he can feel himself already barrelling towards a cresting. Hannibal grabs Will's thigh, pushing his leg back, angling the other fallen just so until—

"*Hannibal*," Will gasps, eyes wide and unblinking, staring up at the ceiling. He remembers the last time. He remembers staring straight up at the ceiling of Hannibal's old bedroom in Baltimore, wishing that someone in the consulate could see them. See what they're doing. Now, Will's eyes make out the smooth plaster finish of the roof, and he finds no one staring back at him.

He curls around Hannibal. "Let go," he mumbles against the other's neck, "come in me. *Please*."

The muscle under his hands tenses, seizes, and slackens. One last thrust into Will's body, and white light engulfs them both. A choked sound of pleasure is buried into Hannibal's neck as Will's entire body convulses. Hannibal's' teeth have sharpened. They've pierced skin. Distantly, Will's aware of pain blooming in the tendons of his neck.

His hands gentle. Fingers trail over skin, lightly, without a scratch. Hannibal buries his nose into Will's neck, scenting a familiar mixture of sandalwood and musk, with a tang of sweat covering it.

"I would see no harm come to you, my love," Hannibal breathes, nuzzling further into the juncture of Will's neck and shoulder. "I would kill them all for laying a finger on you."

"I don't need your protection, but I gladly accept and appreciate it," Will mumbles. "Just know that I would do the same for you."

It takes a couple of minutes before either is ready to part or a moment to settle into an entwined position on their sides. Hannibal curls around Will, slinging an arm around his waist, tugging just so until Will's back is pressed against Hannibal's chest. His other arm is used as a pillow. Will's eyelids begin to droop closed as Hannibal starts to card his fingers through the mop of curls.

"They're not great odds, you know," Will whispers. They face a wall of windows. Although the courtyard is hidden from view, Will can imagine illuminated eyes blinking in the darkness.

Hannibal hums.

"Two fallen angels and a tennin," Will continues, pressing back into Hannibal's hold. "Armed, but alone against a legion on two fronts."

It’s another long moment before Hannibal speaks. “Sleep, my love. Let me worry about battle tactics and strategies.”

It’s not a command, but between the warmth of Hannibal’s body and the way that his fingers softy comb through Will’s hair, Will can’t help but sink further and further into sleep. The last thing he sees before it finally tugs him under are stars blinking outside, peering through a small crack in the curtains.

Chapter End Notes

Let's all just ignore the fact that I can't write smut for shit.

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

I am so sorry for forgetting about this fic. I...I don't have any excuse, to be honest.

Archangels don’t lounge. They don’t stalk. They don’t sulk. But looking around at his siblings, Gabriel can’t think of any other terms to describe what each one is doing.

His younger siblings, Azrael and Raphael, they keep close to the counsel room’s door; ready to bolt at a moment’s notice, should anything get testy. Barachiel slumps in his throne, idly tapping his fingers against the marble armrest. Michael stalks around their gathering place. Sulking.

“And where are they now?” he says lowly. A tone just on the wrong side of rage. All it could take is an unapproved answer. Gabriel glances over to Uriel. They’ve left their charge unsupervised for a while. Though, time here and time there often don’t line up correctly.

Uriel lifts his chin. “We’re working on it, brother.” He throws a glance over to Barachiel, who doesn’t seem that intent on adding anything to their meeting. Uriel’s’ expression doesn’t change. “These hunts take time.”

“I don’t have *time*,” Michael growls. Gabriel tries to suppress a small smirk that threatens to lift the corners of his lips as both Azrael and Raphael move to the edge of their own seats. Michael’s eyes glisten. “With every moment that passes, that Watcher’s strength returns to him. And now you,” he points a long finger at Uriel, “tell me that our drake is raising an army against me?”

It had been news to him too. Gabriel, the Messenger. Gabriel, where nothing can be so much as whispered without him hearing about it first. But what Uriel and Barachiel brought to the consulate; well, that was news to even him.

Barachiel changes the rhythm of his tapping fingers. “Does that truly bother you, Michael? A few featherless traitors following the delusions of a feral angel?”

All at once, Michael clears the room in a matter of strides. “It *doesn’t* bother me,” he hisses. Barachiel is unflinching, even as Michael looms over him on his throne. “I just want this dealt with.”

“And it will be,” Uriel interjects. “Let us deal with it.”

Uriel and Barachiel soon take their leave. Michael doesn’t even bother to snap as Barachiel brushes him aside to stand up from his throne. With the first of them gone, Azrael and Raphael take their leave. Selaphiel, who never really speaks at any of these things, manages

to slip away with the rest of them. The consulate is always a quiet thing once his siblings have sulked off to wherever it is that they usually go to.

Gabriel almost does the same before Michael's cold and hard voice stops him in his tracks. "You have been awfully quiet, brother. This must be a first; my messenger, lost for words."

The archangel lifts his chin. "Not lost, brother. I just have nothing of interest to report to you."

Michael nods, slowly, after a time. His eyes narrow slightly. "Everything is always of some importance. Tell me, what have you heard?"

Gabriel sits further back in his throne. "Prayers, mostly," he answers simply, because it's the truth. "A war has broken out in Syria, and people have prayed for it to stop."

Michael arches a brow. "I never understood why Father's pets were such feral things."

"They were modelled after us, brother," Gabriel replies. "All of us."

A silent moment passes between both of them, only broken by the sound of teeth grinding. Michael clenches his jaw. "Find me that Watcher," he growls.

Will is the last to wake up. When he surfaces, he's aware of many things; sunlight streaming in through a small crack in the curtains, slowly crawling towards the foot of the bed; warm sheets slung over his shoulder; movement in the hallway outside. He lifts his head from his pillow. From the footfalls alone, he guesses that Chiyoh is wandering through the halls and rooms. Probably putting away the last of their things.

Rousing as much energy as he can manage, Will throws the blankets off of him and slips out of bed. Muscles protest, and for a moment, the room starts to teeter; but he squares himself.

Will pulls on a pair of worn jeans and a sweater before going in search of Hannibal. Watery morning light streams into the house. The day outside seems clean and fresh. Even through the walls of the house, Will's ears twitch at the sound of the ocean outside crashing against the cliffs.

By the time he reaches the kitchen, Will realises something. His back feels fine. He flexes the muscles in his back, moving and stretching out his arms. Nothing. As he thinks back, he didn't feel any pain last night. Heat blooms in his core. Afterimages of last night flash before him.

His feet carry him further into the kitchen. He can still feel Hannibal's hands on his skin—

"I was going to bring breakfast to you."

Will blinks. Hannibal stands at the kitchen island, a tray laden with scrambled eggs, seasoned sausage, toast, and cups of coffee. Will's eyes soften. "I didn't think that you were the breakfast-in-bed type." But he drifts over to the island and takes a seat. His stomach rumbles as the scent of meat and toasted bread lines the roof of his mouth.

Hannibal hands him a knife and fork. "I'm not," he replies, taking a seat opposite Will. "But for you, I can make exceptions. You looked so at peace in sleep that I didn't wish to disturb you."

Will lifts a forkful of soft scrambled eggs to his mouth. Recipes tweaked and developed over millennia. Some always remain mostly the same. He snatches a slice of toast. "Where's Chiyoh?" Although he heard her roaming around outside, on his wander to the kitchen, he didn't manage to spot the woman.

Hannibal takes a measured sip of coffee. "I have something to be taken care of," he says, moving some food around on the plate. "She offered to do it for me."

The house is quiet. Both fallen eat their breakfasts in peace, trading the occasional comment. As Will nabs the last slice of toast, smearing a generous spread of butter on it, he spots Hannibal's sabre sitting on the kitchen counter, still in its sheathe.

A small frown creases his brow. "What are you doing with your sword?"

Hannibal glances over his shoulder to it. "I'll have to sharpen it," he says, turning back around to Will. "The years have dulled its bite."

Will's dagger is still hidden in one of his bags. He sets down his knife and fork. "Do you remember how to use it?"

Something glimmers in the other fallen's eyes. "Muscle memory, my darling," he says slowly. "One never forgets how to swing a sword."

Because you'll need it if the dragon comes, his own mind supplies. Will almost grimaces into his breakfast. The idea of Dolarhyde coming here, disturbing the peace that has taken a careful rest over the house, makes his blood start to boil. This is their home, their space. And a feral angel slinking in and posing a threat doesn't sit well at all with Will.

He finishes the last of his breakfast and looks back to Hannibal's sword. Even looking at it, he can feel the searing hot burn of adamas against his skin. That is Hannibal's blade. It'll have his name scrawled somewhere on the blade, firmly tying them both together. Will looks away. His own blade is stuff somewhere in the bags they brought with them.

"Still," Will says, setting his cutlery down, "wouldn't hurt to practise." He looks at Hannibal, seated at the other side of the kitchen island.

The other fallen nods and rises. "We should always be prepared," Hannibal says collecting their empty plates. He gives Will a momentary glance. "If you're up to it, that is."

Will rolls his shoulders. “I’m good,” he says; and for once, it’s true. His muscle ripple down his back, and his shoulder blades roll.

Hannibal nods and stacks their plates on one arm. “Go and change,” he gestures to the hallway with the other, “I’ll meet you outside when you’re ready.”

Will steps out into the courtyard to the back of the house almost an hour later. Rested and fed, his bones and muscles feel much looser than in the last few weeks. He tucks his worn tee into his sweatpants. Any hold that Hannibal may get on him would be an endgame. His skin bristles against the sharp chill of the ocean wind. Snow has threatened to fall over the past few days, but he has no idea how far north or south that they’ve travelled since being in Virginia.

His dagger is sheathed to his waist. Freshly sharpened and gleaming, it threatened to nick Will’s fingers as he trailed one over the incantation along the length of the blade.

Hannibal is already outside, perched on a stone bench, running a whetstone over the sword. He’s dressed in a simple black, long-sleeved tee, dress pants, and is barefoot. It’s the most relaxed Will has ever seen him look.

His fingers twitch by his side. “Do you want to go hand-to-hand, or just work on blades?” Will squints as the sun manages to fight through a thick overcast of clouds.

The shrieking over stone and metal stops. “Blades,” Hannibal answers simply, standing and twirling the pommel of the blade in his hand. It’s like watching water flow. Even his stance, how he walks and approaches Will, has changed. Hannibal lets his sword-arm hang heavy by his side. “Archangels will either kill you by blade or by touch by palm. They wouldn’t be as carnal as to us fists in a fight.”

“Speaking from experience?”

“If an archangel touches you,” Hannibal says, approaching Will as a lion would its prey, “they can and will smite you. Their touch can be lethal.” He raises his arm, placing the point of his sabre just centimetres from Will’s heart. The metal could burn him. A blade of another has a mind of its own – and cares not for the touch of a stranger. Hannibal’s blade was created for him and him only.

Even now, Will can feel searing heat starting to warm his skin. With a quick, sure movement, Will unsheathes his dagger, twirls the pommel firmly into his palm, and pushes Hannibal’s sabre away from him. The familiar screech of metal and against grains against his ears. All at once, afterimages of millennia spent hunting and fighting blink in front of him.

Will staggers back.

A scorching hot sun scalds his skin. Beads of sweat tumble down his face, sticking his hair to his forehead and stinging his eyes.

“Stay with me,” Hannibal mumbles. The words are barely audible over the rush of blood.

Will blinks. Sometimes, just beyond reach, he sees scenes of a past life. Hunting through scorching sands and freezing mountains. Other times, when the afterimage dissipates, all he sees is Hannibal’s eyes, softly searching for his own.

He swallows. “I’m okay,” he mutters. His fingers tighten around the pommel of his blade, his knuckles turning a stark white. “I’m okay.”

Hannibal doesn’t look convinced. He takes one step towards Will, but the other man lurches forward with a swing of his dagger; easily blocked and sent sideways by Hannibal’s sword.

He doesn’t know how long they spend there. The sun is hidden by a thick forest of clouds, keeping the light muted and dull. But as his muscles start to tense and grow weary, and his movements get progressively more sloppy, he has to stagger back and hold up a hand. “That’s all I can do for the day,” he gasps, trying to get as much air back into him as he can.

Hannibal looks considerably more composed, although some strands of hair are stuck to his sweat-stained brow. He combs his hair back into place. “I don’t want you straining yourself,” he nods, placing his sword against the stone bench. Even though the heavy clouds have long since rolled in, blocking out the sun, the blade of Hannibal’s sword still shines and glints.

Will sheathes his own blade. He bends down, resting his hands on his knees, as he heaves in air into his lungs. His lungs feel like they’re on fire. All of his muscles ache.

There’s a soft, warm touch between his shoulder blades. “Take a moment,” Hannibal mumbles. The words are almost lost underneath the roaring of a sea below them. But Will turns his head to listen to the other fallen. Eventually, he manages to stand up straight. His muscles groan in protest, but nothing is overly tired or painful. Hannibal still looks at him. “I’m fine,” Will assures. Whether or not it’s to placate the other fallen, or himself, he isn’t quite sure.

But eventually, Hannibal moves away. “Come,” he gestures back towards the house. “Chiyoh will be returning soon.”

Hannibal fetches his sword

An army, Barachiel snickers. *A hoard of flightless things, more like.*

Uriel hums. While no sound comes out, the air between them vibrates with it.

They stalk through the shadows, golden bright eyes locked on to their serpent. He slithers among the shadows with them; if they're not careful, one wrong foot could give them away.

Barachiel is sensible enough to keep his grumblings to himself. Words wisp through Uriel's mind, as if his brother brushed them against his ear. *To get his army, our serpent seems to be killing quite a lot of Father's pets.*

Uriel lifts a shoulder. His cowl and cloak barely move. *Father doesn't seem bothered.*

Far worse things have happened to His pets; and not once has he ever stepped in to help. One would even think that maybe Father liked toying with his creatures, seeing how far He could push them.

His eldest children even had a name for it: The Grand Plan. Whether it was a collection of many plans, or one never-ending unfurling one, no one seemed to know; not even Father's eldest children. The seven of the archangels were born at the first concept of time and space; and since then, Uriel has lost track of the number of *plans* deliberated over and enacted.

Father always had several up his sleeve.

They watch as more broken, wingless creatures are *freed* from their earthly lives. Blood trickles out of the front doors of houses. When their serpent slithers out with his companions, they stagger out, eyes blearily – as if seeing sense for the first time.

Barachiel watches one house in particular. Their serpent has spent their time gathering the men – the forces – that he needs. Why he needs them when two archangels are at his disposal, neither of them know. But there's something feral in the serpent's eye – something that reminds Barachiel of the rabid dogs that Father's pets keep as animals for themselves. And rabid dogs, if they draw too much blood, have to be put down.

His hand has been stuck to the pommel of his sword since they started their shadowing.

A small camp has been established for Francis' kin. In a hollowed out building in the outskirts of the city, a building long abandoned to time, barrels with roaring fires are scattered around, with trembling fallen around them.

Barachiel lifts his chin. Most of them have lost their bite. Since their mating and breeding with the humans, their teeth have been filed down and their claws pulled out. Most of them have probably never laid eyes on another fallen. The Falls tended to scatter the unwanted to the four winds.

A few of them have that feral look left; a small glint laced through the blood-red irises of the fallen. Barachiel lifts his chin, scrutinising. If it's fodder the serpent wants, he's getting fields of it.

Even with dulled teeth and claws, who wouldn't be outraged at the notion that one of their own is selling their souls to the devil? It almost earns a leering grin out of him.

Francis prowls around. His blade might have dulled over the years, but it glints as he walks with it, his knuckles tight as he grips the pommel – as if another fall would jerk it out of his hand. Sweeping his eyes over those he's gathered, he sighs. "A brother has betrayed us," he says. Something that has been repeated over the past few collections. Every family destroyed was because of a brother – if the dragon didn't insist on terrorising villagers, then no one would have to act. A low growl is pulled out of Francis' throat.

The air around them shifts and changes. It has a tremor ricocheting up Barachiel's back. Turning his head elegantly to the only entrance into the hideaway, a small frown pulls at his brow at the sight of a fallen scurrying inside.

Uriel tilts his head.

This one looks different from the rest. His teeth still have a bite; even if his armour nowadays is a pressed shirt, slacks, and a woollen jumper. He carries his head a bit higher than the rest of them, having no problem clearing through the building to join Francis' side. Barachiel narrows his eyes.

Caught in the fallen's hand is a slip of neatly folded paper. The fallen brushes some words to the shell of Francis' ear before leaning away, gravitating towards one of the lit barrels. He keeps his eyes down. That pulls at Barachiel's lip. *Smart creature*, he thinks. *Deferring to his better*.

Even if their serpent doesn't have his wings anymore – a cruel act that was more an insult than self-harm – his blood is still sanctified.

Francis uncoils the paper, scanning reddened eyes over the words laid out in front of him. Their serpent is stubbornly stoic in his expressions. He gives nothing away. But there's a storm in his head; thoughts swirling around and crashing into each other, rarely ever settling.

But the serpent does speak. "How recent is this?" His voice is low as he holds up the piece of paper.

The fallen folds his arms across himself, staving off the chill. "They're monthly payments. The last one was made a few weeks ago."

Francis' jaw tightens. His nod is stiff. Red eyes scan his camp in front of him. Stuffing the paper into his jacket pocket, he stalks around the barrels and those gathered around them.

For most of his soldiers, their teeth and claws mean nothing now. But Barachiel notes some others; who've turned sour since landing. Whose teeth have grown sharper and claws longer. Those are the ones Francis seeks out. His growl is low. "The rest of you, stay here and rest." He turns to those with glints in their eyes. "My captains; follow me."

Chapter 12

Chiyoh comes in and out of the house so often that it becomes like the lapping of the sea against a shore. Will even stops noticing Chiyoh's prolonged absences when she disappears. Hannibal would give him vague ideas as to where the woman goes, but nothing concrete.

With Hannibal being actively hunted and Will still shaking the last of back pain out of his bones, Chiyoh seems to be the only one who could move freely around. She checks on other safe houses dotted throughout the world. She checks on the stores they kept and if they need to be replenished.

That was until, from his seat in the courtyard outside the house, Will's ears pricked at a car door being slammed. Looking up from his blade, he blinks at the sight of the woman striding towards the house, the lapels of her coat flapping in the wind with every long stride she takes. Her expression is unreadable, but an aura blooms out of her. Will slips his dagger back into its sheathe and ties it to his waist. It sits comfortably flat against his side. It's slowly earning its bite back.

When he steps into the house, Chiyoh and Hannibal hold a quiet conversation between them. Will strains his ears, trying to catch some of it; but Hannibal's shoulders square when he sees the other fallen. His expression is like stone for a moment. Chiyoh's fingers twitch and fumble by her side. Occasionally cracking a knuckle, it's a nervous habit that she's never been able to shake.

"Will," Hannibal says suddenly after a time, "are you up for a drive?"

A small frown creases his brow. The home had become their sanctuary; leaving it to step out into a world infested with serpents wouldn't do them any good.

Unless Hannibal felt something's importance outweighed their safety.

Will's jaw tightens, but he nods.

Half-breed. *Mutt*. *Mongrel*.

Those are the words and names he hears thrown around most often: hissed and spat by the small number of fallen who didn't get lured into the beds of human women. Those who did oftentimes stuck around with their mates, marrying them, and raising their young in small-knit communities dotted around the world throughout several eras. The offspring seemed to tame them. Will spent far too long wandering through many cities to not notice that the supposed vicious and deranged creatures he should have been hunting were now docile: content in their duties as carers for such small and helpless creatures.

Will faintly remembers them: they looked like their mothers, typically. No particular traits of angels, fallen or otherwise, ever peered through. They may have had increased growth – many ageing rapidly, but suffered ligament and muscle pain from it – but that was all Will ever noticed.

Those who did not bed the daughters of man hated them: just as they hated all of Father's supposedly favourite creatures. It could always be seen in their eyes and snarling lips.

Half-breed. Mutt. Mongrel.

"Nephilim," Hannibal informs him as they drive through opened, wrought iron gates. Trees line the driveway, with their canopies wringing together to form a protective shield against the sky. Will can't help the small smirk that tugs on his lip. The trees almost seem to block Michael's very view of this path. As Chiyoh continues to drive down the long stretch of road, Hannibal turns his head slightly. "I'm sure you've encountered them before?"

Will nods.

Hannibal's expression is entirely unreadable. Gauging. "And what's your impression of them?"

At that, Will's brow creases into a faint frown. "My impression? They're children. They didn't get any say in being created."

The answer cracks Hannibal's wall. There's a smile – it's barely there, but Will has known him for too long to not be able to spot it. Hannibal doesn't say anything else but merely turns back around to face the road.

Will looks ahead and sees, just as the trees around them start to break apart, a large house appears along the horizon. It looks like an old farmhouse, reshaped into something new and slightly modernised. There's a small roundabout in front of a large flight of steps leading up to the doorway of the building. The car rolls to a halt just in front of the steps.

"This is as close to being back in Baltimore as I want to be right now," Chiyoh suddenly says. Once the ignition is switched off, she turns and settles Hannibal with a firm expression. "Once you have gathered your ward, we need to leave."

Hannibal merely nods. He stands outside the car for a moment, and Will suddenly realises that he wants him to follow. With a little bit of manoeuvring, he's able to get himself out from the backseat of the car with minimal strain on his back.

"So...your *ward*?" Will stuffs his hands into his jacket pockets. The steps up to the building's door are lined with freshly fallen rain from the night before. With the bitterly cold wind that's breezing through, it's starting to freeze over. Even though he's wrapped up in thermals, a thick sweater, a scarf, and a coat, the sudden drop in temperature makes the wounds on his back protest.

Hannibal tugs his coat tighter around himself to fend off the suddenly cold. "I stumbled across this particular nephilim quite recently. I had met her father: an odd fallen. The

production of a child by a human would normally sate any need within a fallen to cause harm, but it didn't in this case. It stoked the fire already there. He seemed to enjoy inflicting pain on humans – young girls, specifically."

Will's ears prick to the sound of chatter and laughter outside – on the other side of the building. He can only imagine the large open fields surrounding the building would be ideal for letting forgotten children and damaged people out to explore: with supervision, obviously.

"So she isn't yours then." Will regards Hannibal coolly. He's aware of how the statement/question sounds. As soon as the words have tumbled out of his mouth, he wants to snap and clench his jaw shut. But they're there now: hanging in the space between them.

Hannibal's lips purse into a thin line. It takes him too long, in Will's opinion, to shake his head. "Not in a biological sense," he amends, and continues up towards the door of the building with Will in tow.

Three simple raps at the mahogany door are enough for it to be answered. A middle-aged lady in white, clean scrubs peers out. As soon as she spots Hannibal, her face softens. "Oh, Dr Lecter," she says, stepping to the side and opening the door to let them both in out of the cold.

"I was wondering if I could take Abigail out for the day. I think stretching her legs may be good for her – mentally and physically speaking, of course." The words that flow out of Hannibal's mouth are effortless and like ambrosia. The nurse nods along, smiling brightly and answering with an "of course!" Fallen have a way with words. Even with their immortal, power-giving blood brained from their veins, Hannibal doesn't need it. He has a deadly mix of impeccable manners and disarming charm that works just fine.

The nurse leaves them in the reception area: what looks to be an old foyer of the house, with minimal furniture scattered around and a simple desk and chair for the receptionist. A large staircase runs up to what he can only presume are patient rooms. He watches the nurse take two-steps at a time as she ascends the grand staircase.

"Hidden in plain sight?" he says, glancing around at some pictures that hang on the walls surrounding them. The faint smell of disinfectant stings at his nose. It's vaguely hospital-like.

Hannibal lifts a shoulder in a slight, but elegant, shrug. "I couldn't harbour her in my own home. It would raise too much suspicion." He then sets his jaw. "You have heard of attitudes towards our kind souring in the last number of decades. I've seen many a time when the same sour attitude can be brought on to an innocent child such as her. She is not responsible for the crimes of her father."

Their hushed conversation is interrupted by the nurse returning. As she descends the stairs, she's trailed by a slender figured girl with her head down. Her long dark hair curtains around her face, but he manages to get a quick glimpse of her face. She's young, Will notes. Young enough to be a teenager by human standards.

Once she's spotted Hannibal standing in the foyer, the girl smiles brilliantly. All at once, she rushes down the last couple of steps, past the nurse, and towards Hannibal. "You're here!"

She's enveloped in a firm hug. Hannibal perches his chin at the top of her head.

Will frowns slightly. Rarely are people ever invited into Hannibal's personal space like that.

It suddenly dawns on him that the girl in front of him may be the oldest he's ever seen them get. He's seen countless nephilim children through the aeons: but only now does it click with him that he's only ever seen *children*; creatures whose heads barely reach their parent's hips.

The girl standing in front of him is a teenager.

They step out of the hug when a couple of patients wander through the foyer, escorted by a nurse. "Where are we going?" she asks, cocking her head slightly, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear.

Hannibal holds out his hand. The girl takes it without question. "I thought we could go for a trip," Hannibal explains simply. Will glances back at the nurse. She's returned to her seat behind the reception desk, beginning to idly scroll through what he can only assume are reports and files. She doesn't seem concerned at them strolling out the front door.

Chiyoh is waiting in the car; engine running, with her fingers drumming against the steering wheel. She glances out and spots the three of them slowly strolling down the steps. Her gaze hardens, but she turns to look straight ahead.

"Abigail, this is Will."

He turns to see the girl holding out her hand towards him. Her smile isn't as bright as it had been inside, but it's enough to curl the corners of her lips. "Hi," she says.

Hannibal's eyes wander to their joined hands. "Will is a fallen," he explains, bringing one of his hands to the small of her back to usher her towards the car. "He's a close friend of mine." Chiyoh has the heater on in the car. The warmth inside is a welcomed relief to the sharp nip of cold air blowing down from a nearby collection of hills.

She must know Chiyoh, Will notes, as Abigail acknowledges the woman in the front seat with a sharp nod and barely-there smile, before settling in the back. Will takes the other seat by her side. Hannibal gets into the passenger seat, and as quickly as they had arrived, they leave. As Chiyoh drives them up the narrow laneway towards the gates, Will can feel the nephilim's gaze burning into the side of his face.

Abigail cocks her head. "You've been on Earth for a while," she notes. Her lips press together. "But you haven't been a fallen for long."

Will has to stop his eyes from narrowing. "How do you know that?"

"I can sense something in you. I'm not sure what it is, but you don't seem like any fallen

"Will is still going through a metamorphosis," Hannibal explains from the front. He turns his head slightly to speak to the back of the car. "I must explain a lot to you, Abigail. But I assume you know about the recent purging?"

She nods. Something shadows across her face, but it's gone within seconds. News must have reached an institution like that pretty easily. He didn't see any, but he's sure there are TVs somewhere in the building. If not, humans like their gossip. And if Abigail's ears were keen enough, she might have heard something whispered in the hallways of the home.

She watches him out of the corner of her eye. While her attention is focused on Hannibal, answering his questions and listening to his recollection of the recent events, she keeps Will in her peripheral.

The drive back seems quicker. Rolling fields outside the main city of Baltimore stretch out as far as the horizon. The tarmac road becomes bumpier and the cars around thin out. Eventually, his nose wrinkles at the sharp stinging scent of saltwater.

Abigail's brow is creased as she looks out her own window, taking in the view of the ocean in the distance. He can't imagine that Hannibal has ever taken her this far away from the hospital.

The house is just as still as when they left it. But Chiyoh still stalks forward first, rifle jostled down into her hands as she enters to sweep the house.

Abigail's head is cocked slightly to the side. She looks to Hannibal, an eyebrow slightly arched.

When Chiyoh waves them in, Abigail stays close to Hannibal. She defers to him, for the most part. The ingrained behaviour of a nephilim. He takes her scarf and coat and sets them to the side. The nephilim steps further into the house, each footfall carefully placed. Her eyes sweep over everything. Hannibal isn't far behind her.

She stands in the middle of the kitchen, her hands wringing in front of her. Shuffling over to the island in the middle, she sets her hands on to the cool marble.

"Has anything peculiar happened at the hospital?" Hannibal asks, pushing a small bowl of fruit towards the nephilim.

Abigail frowns, recalling. "A Dr. Bloom visited," she says, snatching an apple from the bowl.

Hannibal tilts his head. "What was she there for?"

"She's doing a study," Abigail recounts. "Something about the psyche of fallen. I don't know, I didn't hear much. The nurses wouldn't let her in."

Hannibal nods. Something akin to relief flashes across his face.

She slowly shuffles around the house, running her hand over cabinets and tables and the back of couches. Her expression is schooled into something not entirely neutral. There's a curiosity crawling out through the cracks, but there's concern too. Will tries not to crowd her, but act as a shadow to both her and Hannibal. When he explains everything that has happened so far, Abigail's frown only grows. "Then why didn't you leave me in the hospital?" she asks after a time. "I was safe there."

Hannibal's sigh is long and tired. "Unfortunately not any more, my darling," he says softly. Reaching out, he tucks a stray strand of hair behind her ear. "Our dragon had uncovered the payments I was giving the hospital. He would have found you and I dread to think of what he might have done in order to lure me out into the open."

Abigail's face tightens slightly. "But what about the rest of them? The other nephilim at the hospital – he might hurt them."

"He wouldn't concern himself with sheep," Hannibal gentles. "I know it's difficult to understand but I don't care about their lives, Abigail. I care about yours. You're far too precious to me to lose."

Will tries to school his own expression. Hannibal doesn't know that. Their dragon could very well concern himself with the sheep. He's taken out families just to get his hands on the fallen. If he was faced with a hospital full of halflings, what would he do?

But he bites his tongue. Abigail is what Hannibal wanted to get, and she's here. One more thing snagged away from the dragon's maw. One more thing added to the pile of gold their own dragon nests on top of.

Something settles over the house for the rest of the day, stretching into the night. The air crackles with tension. The knowledge that the dragon could have come so close, could have gotten his claws into Hannibal's ward, it sits with the elder fallen. He might not say anything about it – preferring to serve up dinner for his companions and follow Will to bed – but Will knows that there's a storm waging in his mind.

Lying across from him now, Will reaches out. His fingers graze the side of Hannibal's face, running over the ridge of a cheekbone and down to his jaw. Hannibal's eyes blearily blink open.

Just over the man's shoulder, lines of long, lancet windows look out on to the cliff and the ocean reaching out to the horizon. A black sky, dimly lit by a scattering of stars and the faint streams of moonlight, he half expects to see something. Too many of his countless years were spent staring up at the sky. His siblings, younger and older, would look right back at him. And the sky would always be as still and silent as the grave, offering no counsel or help when Will needed it most.

His last memory of the sky is hurtling through it, wings ripped out of his back and the air scalding his skin.

Hannibal moves his head, leaning slightly into Will's touch. "You're both very precious to me," he whispers, reaching up to catch Will's hand in his own. Their fingers interlock and lace, tightening as if something would drag either of them away.

Will's lips thin. "It will be fine," he breathes. Whether the words are for Hannibal, him, or both of them, he doesn't know. He shuffles closer. A slight chill worms its way in through the sliding doors, nipping at their exposed skin. Hannibal reaches and coils an arm around him, pulling him closer. Their skin meets, and warmth blooms.

Uriel's nose wrinkles at the acrid smell of smoke. Hovering between plains, he's certain that no one can see either him or his brother. Whispering words into their serpent's ears is all they're able to do without showing themselves and startling the sheep. But death and destruction don't know the borders of plains; instead slipping through and souring the air. Out of the corner of his eye, Uriel spots his brother observing too. He seems less bothered.

The night sky is chased away by the fire engulfing the hospital. The screams have stopped. All that's left now is the crackle and roar of the fire. Bodies lay scattered on the cobblestone drive. Red blood pools underneath them, drenching the stones. Those left inside burn with the building, their ashes picked up and scattered along with the wind. Most of them are mutts – the serpent's followers made sure to slit their throats in their sleep before setting the building alight.

Barachiel had followed their serpent, stalking shielded by the shadows, as he searched every room and floor level for someone – a girl, a mutt. But she was nowhere to be seen.

A small herd of humans kneel just outside the hospital's ruins, their backs scalded by the heat of the fire. Uriel's eyes threaten to roll at their choked off sobbing. The serpent's followers stay close, guarding their prey. One of them lashes out, kicking a guard's back to push him to the floor.

There's a cry that bursts through the rest of them before a short, sharp growl from the serpent silences them. Walking through the fires had been no problem – one last sweep through the building to check that the mutt wasn't hiding in the walls or in the attic. Blessed blood can be a gift. Uriel lifts his chin. It'll prove a slight problem in beheading the creature – but a blessed adamas blade shouldn't have too much trouble.

There's one human that their serpent has his eyes on. His blade swings with every step he takes, but it glints with firelight as he comes to stand in front of who Uriel can only presume is the head of the hospital.

She's not a particularly young woman. She's stoic, he'll give her that, kneeling in front of a would-be dragon, but staring him right in the eye.

Francis' blade catches her underneath her chin. Tilting her head up, he forces their eyes to stay meeting. "Where is the mongrel?" he growls. "Lecter's ward. Where is it?"

The woman is silent. A moment stretches when all that can be heard is the crackling of a fire and the groaning of collapsing floors and walls. Behind them, Uriel spots, the hospital starts to fall in on itself.

At the tightening of the woman's jaw, Francis sighs. He glances to the side. With barely a nod, one of his captains draws her blade. With a shrill shriek, its blade catches the light of the fire before it's swung down on to a human's neck. The guard from before slumps to the

ground, his head rolling to the side. The captain's lip lifts in a small snarl before she stalks over to the person beside him.

The humans either side of the woman crow, begging to be spared. But none of them offer anything helpful. Barachiel straightens, running his eyes over each of them. Time spent wringing answers out of them is time they could spend turning up stones and parting seas. The fallen they're after can't stay hidden for long. Something will break their cover.

Defiant eyes stare back up at the serpent, the snarl curling a cut and bleeding lip. "You killed all of the nephilim here." Her voice holds firm, even over the roaring of flame. "There's none left."

Francis stands stock still for a moment, scrutinising the woman and her words. His blade hangs by his side. The fallen on either side of him growl; feral, snarling dogs held on by a leash, wanting to bite and maul. But they wait on their commander; reddish coloured eyes stare at Francis' profiles.

The fallen lifts his chin, pressing his lips together. With one swift motion, he lifts up his sword and plunges it down. Blood scatters across the cobblestones, staining them red.

Humans look away, down at their hands scrabbling at the ground. Francis turns; his front stained red with flecks of red, some of it even flicking across his chin. "Find the mutt," he growls lowly. Each of his followers' eyes glint.

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"There was a slaughter last night," the angel of the Eastern Gate says simply. Perched on the roof of a building nestled in the centre of the city, both he and Gabriel look out on to the Baltimore horizon. The angel's wings shudder with a passing chill breeze. "Some sort of sanctuary for halfbreeds. It was outside the city."

Gabriel's eyes lock on to the rising sun. It struggles over the horizon, clambering over the cityscape lain out between them. Almost as if the sun didn't want to come out and shine. Gabriel's jaw tightens.

The angel beside him sighs. "There are rumours that it was Dolarhyde and his followers."

At that, Gabriel's laugh is more of a scoff. *Of course it was Dolarhyde*, he snarls. *I'm sure my brothers weren't far away*.

There's no reply from the angel at his side.

If Uriel or Barachiel, or both, started whispering words into the dragon's ear, then he isn't surprised to hear about the destruction caused. While Uriel is shrewd, Barachiel is more upfront. A scalpel and a hammer. Both of them lilting words into a dragon's ear, watching smoke plume out from its jaw.

The angel shuffles, shifting weight from one foot to another. "Our mutual friend and his mate are still safe," his voice is low, as if his words might be carried along with the wind to listening ears. "But Dolarhyde was looking for someone; a nephilim." The angel lifts his chin. "Could it belong to one of them?"

Gabriel's jaw tightens. *Neither of them would have been as careless to leave a halfling out in the world, unprotected.*

"The thing is, though, it *was* protected." The angel's wings shudder at another shrill breeze rolling through the rooftops. "The hospital was a sanctuary. One of your larks overheard that Zadkiel made sure that a set amount of gold was left for it to protect itself."

And that gold attracted a dragon, Gabriel clicks his tongue. His larks wouldn't have let that information slide. Francis' own followers must be able to find whispers too.

The angel beside him lowers his head. "Michael will be expecting an update on our search soon," he says, looking out on to the city.

Gabriel's jaw squares. His brother's shadow looms over him like a cloak, weighing him down to the ground. His wings cramp with how tense he holds himself these days. Ruffling himself, he lifts his chin. *Don't worry about my brother. Just keep doing what I've asked of you.*

Hannibal has just enough time to stagger back from Will's blade aiming for his side. Gaining his footing back, he lifts his chin. "You're improving," he says firmly, a soft fond smile ghosting his lips.

He twirls his sword in his hand. Settling on a grip, he suddenly strikes out. Will's back barely protests the way he has to duck and dive to get out of the way of being pierced or scalded by an *adamas* blade. He's inflicted enough blows to fallen in the past to know how much it can hurt. The ghost of a smell still lingers in his nose when Hannibal's blade dusts his clothes.

Time slips by as they try new drills. Will's palm begins to form around the handle of his dagger, the familiar weight of it settling within his bones. Azrael's words come back to him. *A blade should be an extension of the arm*. After a few hours of practice, he remembers how quick he used to be. He knew everywhere he could hit for a fatal, and merciful, kill; at the base of the skull, the throat, the armpit. Anywhere he could find a major blood vessel. His eyes are drawn and linger on Hannibal's chest. The heart, lung, liver; any place that could rupture and kill in seconds. If he was going to spend his time hunting fallen, then he wanted their deaths to be quick and kind.

When the wind starts to nip at their sweat-beaded skin, Hannibal lifts a hand. "I think that will do for today," he says, slightly breathless. He walks over to the marble bench, laying his sword out on it. Will follows, sheathing his own blade by his side. Running his fingers through his hair, fixing it back into place, Hannibal looses a small breath. The ocean below bashes against the cliff-face, starling a small flock of nesting birds in the nearby trees.

Will's ears twitch at the sound of the backyard door opening. Glancing over, he blinks at Abigail carefully stepping out into the courtyard, a cardigan bundled tightly around her to stave off the chill. Her eyes scan the surroundings; everything from the trees to the ocean to the dirt road from the house. She even takes a second to look at the sky.

Hannibal lifts his chin. "Are you alright, Abigail?"

"Just wondering where you went," she replies easily, hugging her arms around herself. Dark hair frames her face. She doesn't look human, but she's not a blessed being either; something radiates off of her. High cheekbones and bright eyes would pass her off as Hannibal's own child. Even though he has no relation to the girl whatsoever, Will scrutinises her face as he can see fragments of the other fallen in her.

Hannibal collects his sword and strides over to her. Reaching out to gentle a hand against her cheek, he smiles. "I would never stray too far from you."

She was hidden in plain sight, Will thinks. *An only an hour's drive away from Baltimore*.

When the other fallen leaves, Will wants to follow. The promise of a warmed house almost makes him shiver. Sweat starts to cool as the winds get nippier. But his path to the door is

blocked by Abigail, who watches him with a careful, but inquiring, look. At the next crash of a wave against the cliff-face nearby, Abigail speaks. “How long have you known Hannibal?”

A small sigh leaves Will before he can stop it. “One could argue all of my life.” He remembers first laying eyes on the fallen, but not *when*. Millennia ago. Maybe even longer.

Abigail’s eyes don’t soften. “And how long is that?”

Will lifts a shoulder. “Long,” he answers simply.

Abigail nods. Her arms tighten around herself when a sheer chill breeze whips through the courtyard. Will walks them over to the veranda, slightly sheltered in the thick vines and foliage growing around the pillars. The only speck of colour for what seems to be miles is here – rosebuds fighting their way into winter, still closed and capped, but standing out as brilliantly red against the green leaves.

They sit next to each other, but leave a sliver of space. Feeling the sweat on his skin start to cool, he fights off a shiver. “Hannibal told me how he met you,” he says after a time. Abigail doesn’t react much, but she does take in a small sharp breath. She doesn’t look at him. Instead, she glances off towards the ocean. A haunted look flashes in her eyes. Will’s jaw tenses. “I don’t know much about your life before, but you seem happy with Hannibal looking out for you.”

The silence that settles between them is thick enough to choke on. He finds himself being slightly grateful to the occasional cawing of a seagull battling against the whipping winds in front of the cliff-face.

When Abigail does speak, her voice is low. It’s almost drowned out entirely by the ocean. “You were a Watcher,” she says slowly, “you killed fallen.”

“And now I am one,” he says simply, splaying his hands. “The universe is full of ironies.”

Even if she tries not to look at him, he catches her keeping him in the corner of her eye.

“You don’t have to trust me if you don’t want to, Abigail,” Will says after a time. “If I were you, I wouldn’t trust me either.”

“Hannibal seems to trust you.”

“Hannibal knows me.”

At that, a small crease wrinkles Abigail’s brow. She doesn’t say anything; instead, pushing up on to her feet and folding her arms over her chest. “He is the only thing in this world that makes sense to me,” she says firmly, but Will’s ears twitch at the sound of a slight wobble over the last words. Swallowing a lump in her throat, Abigail finishes. “I don’t want to lose him. I don’t think I could bear it.”

Will’s eyes soften. “I couldn’t either,” he replies. The dagger by his side warms. “That’s why I’m going to make sure that nothing comes to take him away.”

Michael has always worn one expression on his face.

It's quite difficult to tell what he's feeling or thinking. A stony expression sits there, immovable, as he glowers from angel to angel. The only time Gabriel thinks it ever cracked was during the first purge; when the faintest hints of a leering smile ghosted his brother's lips as he swung his sword, clipping the wings of his younger siblings.

A wall meets Gabriel now. Michael listens to the others, stalking around their thrones with his head cocked to the side. Uriel and Barachiel are noticeably absent. Without them there to give their reports, it falls on to Gabriel.

He keeps his reports short, vague. He can't lie to his brother. Michael has a terrible habit of knowing when he's being lied to. All Gabriel can do is tell him half-truths and hope they land and settle. "There have been no signs of Zadkiel or the Watcher yet," he says simply, keeping Michael always in the corner of his eye. While their commander mulls over everything they say, allowing them to give their piece, no one ever knows if his temper will flare. As Michael ghosts the back of Gabriel's throne, the archangel tries to keep his wings still. "While Uriel and Barachiel have been turning the mortal realm upside down."

"The fallen are in a frenzy," Raphael comments. His wings are tucked snugly against his back, brilliant white plumage slightly ruffled. He doesn't like the lower plains. If he could spend all his time in Heaven, he would. Gabriel sets his eyes to his brother. It's the only place where he's useful. But now, the other archangel lifts his chin – noticeably more confident in his words. "If it was a war you wanted, it's a war you're certainly going to get."

There's a low rumble of sound that echoes through the throne room. Something that sounds eerily like a laugh. "A war would imply that both sides had an equal chance of prevailing."

"So what is this, then?" Raphael asks sternly, the faintest hint of a frown shadowing his brow. "An extermination? A purge, but this time more permanent? What has Father to say about any of this?"

Michael's glower deepens. "It's far from being your business, brother."

Raphael almost snarls; the bow of his lip lifting and baring teeth. "When it concerns the welfare of the creations, it *does* become my business, Michael."

The quiet that sits over them thickens. To his side, he sees Azrael almost melt into his throne, wanting very much to be anywhere else but here. Gabriel can't help but agree.

Michael's growl is low, but rumbles through the air like thunder. "Where were you during the last few purges?" he leers, cocking his head. "I seem to remember you being in the vanguard for some of them."

Gabriel's hand drifts to his blade. This won't be the first time arms have been drawn from their thrones.

Raphael grunts. "If I have to put the welfare of some before others then so be it."

"And that is what I'm asking from you now."

"Are you?" Raphael lifts his chin, challenging.

The air becomes static, nipping at skin and almost choking. Saraqael, possibly the quietest of them all, bows his head, much more interesting in the folds of his robes than the ensuing fight. Gabriel clears his throat, the sound of it almost shattering the air around them. "Infighting is of no help to anyone," he says firmly, wanting to get this over with. He fixes his eyes on to Raphael. The archangel slowly backs into his throne. After a moment, his gaze drops.

Glancing over to Michael, Gabriel's unfazed by the glare. "I will have my larks do one last sweep of the city," he says firmly. "Once I have knowledge, I'll share it with you."

Something glints in Michael's eye – a challenge. But if something tries to claw its way up to his throat, he manages to swallow it.

They're dismissed when Michael turns, stalking towards the upper levels of the room.

Pain isn't a problem anymore. There's a deep twinge and ache that sits just underneath his muscles. His shoulders and back are still getting used to not having the weight of his wings anymore. Pain came when his body had to refigure itself; what made him an angel was being killed, and the bones in his torso have to readjust.

The ache eventually goes away. It only ever surfaces when he moves too quickly, or bends down too far. When a chill breeze manages to slip into the house, brushing its fingers across his back, Will bites down on a groan at his muscles seizing.

He sinks further into his bath, watching with hooded eyes as Hannibal mills around the dimly-lit bathroom gathering what he needs. The main light is off; instead, clusters of candles offer a golden glow to the room. Wisps of steam lift up into the air. Will's fingers skirt along the surface of the water, gentle ripples following the motion. He's been left to soak for almost ten minutes – Hannibal's direct order. *I need your muscles to relax.*

The other fallen settles behind him. Will's head rests against the porcelain lip of the bath. He tilts his head back to look at Hannibal. A slow smile spreads across his lips as Hannibal gestures for him to return to where he was.

Too many nights were spent with Hannibal's hands on him; wringing out knots in his muscles, willing them to relax and accept the change. When fingers grazed over his scars, a

shiver always wrought through him.

Will's eyelids flutter closed as fingers thread through his hair. He focuses on the smells of the room. The musk of damask rose wisp around him, with the faintest hint of citrus sitting among it; smells from oils and lotions that Hannibal seems to have stored everywhere. The fallen's fingers card through Will's curls, drawing product through it. Will bites down on a groan when he feels fingertips slowly massage into his scalp. "I might not ever want to be better, if this is how you treat a man in pain," Will slurs. Sleep skims over him.

Hannibal hums. "If I had my way, you would never know pain again." He eventually moves to Will's shoulders; skilled fingers massaging musk-scented oils deep into his skin. Will even thinks it might be getting into his bones, with how much they've turned to liquid.

The ache ebbs away, just as it always does. But something will come along – a stray wind, or his own exertion – and he'll be back here, with Hannibal's hands beginning his work again.

And Will can't find it in him to complain.

How much time they spend there, he has no idea. He's distantly aware of the water cooling, any exposed plain of skin sitting out of the water starting to pimple with gooseflesh. Hannibal's hands eventually fade away, and Will whines. The other fallen huffs a laugh. "Bed," he gentles, standing up.

The journey from the bathroom to the bedroom stretches out in front of him. As he dries himself off, he glances out into the next room and spots Hannibal gathering sleep clothes for the both of them. Even if his scars have healed over, Hannibal has been adamant about keeping them covered. *They can be deep*, he explained once. *And I won't have you dying of an infection of all things*.

Will pads out into the bedroom, smiling warmly as Hannibal hands him a pair of flannel pyjama bottoms and a slightly oversized tee. Wrangling them on takes longer than expected; with loose muscles that protest having to stretch beyond their reach, getting the tee up and over himself takes some work. But within seconds, he slips into bed with the other fallen, humming contentedly as firm, safe arms coil around him. He nestles his head underneath Hannibal's chin, always keen to keep his nose pressed just at the hollow of the fallen's neck. His scent is strongest there, but underneath his eyelashes, he swears he can feel the rhythmic beat of Hannibal's pulse.

A reminder that he's here, with him, and that they're both safe.

Sleep hasn't always been a friend to him; but recently, it's been merciful in its approach. Sleep takes him under slowly, lowering him down further and further until he slips off completely. The last thing he sees, just over Hannibal's shoulder, is a bright full moon casting a white glare over everything beneath it.

And sleep doesn't last long. Something pulls him out of it, shaking his shoulder as he climbs back up towards wakefulness. Blinking the sleep from his eyes, he stills as he senses his surroundings. The moon is still out, more or less in the same position it was before sleep came. In front of him, Hannibal still sleeps. His face is lax as stray strands of hair dust his

brow. His hold on Will has loosened, but Will knows that with the faintest of movements on his side, Hannibal's arms will tighten and crowd him back into his warmth again.

Everything is the same as how he left it; yet the air is different. Something charges the energy around him, nipping at the back of his neck. He turns his head, pricking his ears to anything within the house. Nothing. There's a howl of wind that sounds from outside, muffled by shut windows and doors and mostly drawn curtains. The house crackles as it relaxes for the night. Occasionally, a floorboard in the hall outside creaks, and goes back to being silent.

Hannibal snuffles lightly against his pillow, his brow knitting together as he sleepily brings Will back to him again. Happy that enough of them press against each other, Hannibal slips back under.

Will's eyelids grow heavy, with the back of his eyes starting to sting from tiredness.

Sleep almost has him ensnared once again before he feels it; the air change.

A change that he knows too well.

Even with his blood deadened, he knows the feeling of a nearby fallen.

Will's lip lifts into a low snarl. His blood chills, but he chases it away. Fear threatens to seep in, with thoughts flooding him about everything and anything – who is it, why are they here, is the fallen one of Francis' followers, or from something else entirely?

How did they find us?

He sets his hand to Hannibal's face, brushing his thumb over the fallen's cheekbone. "Hannibal," he whispers, gentling the other away. When Hannibal's eyes blink open, Will presses a finger to his own lip. *Fallen*, he mouths.

Any hold that sleep had on the other fallen is shaken off entirely as Hannibal's eyes harden. Both of them slip out of bed, with Will's hand instinctively going into the bedside drawer. The leather sheathe of his dagger fits snugly into his palm.

One door is open, the other closed. Chiyoh is gone – presumably also on a hunt of her own through the house. Abigail is asleep. Hannibal's eyes lock on to Abigail's door, something flashing across his face. Will gestures for him, nodding to the door. *Check on her*, he tries to send to the other fallen.

Shadows engulf Hannibal as he moves towards the room, slipping inside to see to his ward. Will turns his ears to the wind, trying to listen to the house. Nothing sits right with him; something seems wrong. As he stalks through the house, keeping his eyes to every corner and seemingly blind spot of the house, he listens.

A shadow casts across the wall, leering and slipping from surface to surface. Will's hackles lift. His fingers skim and coil around the pommel of his dagger. Thumbing it out of its sheathe, the *adamas* glints against the moonlight spilling into the room.

A sharp glint of light appears in the corner of his eye. Lunging back, Will's heart freezes as a longsword swings in front of him, almost lodging into the floor with the force of it. Spinning on his heel, he draws his dagger and faces his attacker.

A fallen; red-eyed and snarling. A faint musk of smoke and blood waft off of him. Will barely has any time to steady his feet before the fallen lunges again, thrusting his blade forward. Will dodges it.

Fallen are instinctive – and a feral fallen isn't an efficient fighter.

Will makes quick work of dodging each lunging strike. Palming his dagger's pommel, his first attack is on the fallen's sword arm. Slashing along the fallen's forearm, it's enough to get a loosened grip on his sword. With that, Will's hand makes a grab for the pommel and wrenches the sword away from the fallen, tossing it to the other side of the room. It lands with an audible clatter – a sound that would have thundered through the house. A sound that would have alerted Hannibal.

The fallen snarls, lunging out with hands trying to grab at Will's wrists. He's quick enough to dodge most attacks, but nails catch against the skin of the back of his hand. Twirling his dagger, he ducks at another swing and lunges forward, right at the fallen's chest. The blade plunges straight through clothing and skin, with the hilt coming to rest flush against the chest.

The fallen's eyes widen, red irises glowing as he looks down at himself. Will grabs the back of his neck, pushing him backwards until the back of his knees knocks the edge of the dining table. The body goes easily, crumpling backwards. The force has Will's dagger going even deeper.

Every death he inflicted on every fallen encountered he made sure was quick. Even the ones that fought back, that snarled and bit and lashed out, he didn't want them to suffer.

But his eyes bear into the fallen beneath him. His mouth is agape, drawing in frantic breaths. A pool of blood bubbles up, with streams starting to streak out of his mouth and down his cheeks.

Will holds his gaze. Watches the life slowly fade out of the body beneath him.

He doesn't even hear Hannibal behind him.

When the body below him sags against the table, head lolling to the side, Will retracts his blade.

Make sure they're dead. Something old whispers in the back of his mind.

A gentle hand catches his wrist, drawing his arm back until his fingers loosen from his dagger. Hannibal stands close; Will can smell him, even through the harsh metallic of blood. Black pools on the table, with tendrils slowly creeping down towards the floorboards.

"My love," Hannibal says slowly. When Will lets go of the dagger, the blade clattering to the ground by his feet, he turns to look at the other fallen. He blinks at what he's met with; an

expression that merges pride and something feral.

Distantly, he's aware of his back beginning to hiss and protest. But he doesn't care. Hannibal's free hand goes to his face, gently cupping Will's cheek. He leans forward, pressing a kiss to the centre of his forehead. A sharp breath leaves Will at the contact, and his hands twitch to reach out to Hannibal and bring him closer.

Will steadies his voice. "Abigail?"

"Sleeping."

"And Chiyoh?"

"Doing one last sweep of outside," Hannibal whispers. His hand trails down to Will's neck. Beneath his palm, the fallen's pulse quickens. "You're beautiful when you fight, darling. I couldn't bear to interrupt the dance you were performing."

Hannibal watched him fight, watched him kill.

Will's brow knits together. "You didn't think to help me?" he asks drily.

"You didn't need help." Hannibal tilts his head, looking into Will's eyes. Millennia spent on this plain have turned them from being red to a dark maroon, almost the colour of blood. A small smile ghosts the fallen's lip. "You seemed quite sure in yourself to take down your opponent."

Will's throat quivers, attempting to close. Speaking becomes difficult. "It's still there," he mutters, "the fight. I never liked killing them, but I did it."

"It was expected of you," Hannibal mulls. "You did what you had to do to survive."

His thumb brushes over the column of Will's neck, where his pulse hammers against skin. Something in the fallen's eyes hardens. "And you still need to survive now," he continues, "we're being hunted, my darling. I think I might be able to sleep a lot better now knowing that you can protect us."

Hannibal's lips dust his temple, a gentle kiss that has warmth blooming through him. But Will pulls away slightly, looking into the fallen's eyes. Something hides behind them.

Will's jaw squares. "How did this one find us?"

Hannibal looks over the body, noting everything from the paling skin to the clothes, to the dropped blade lying at some other part of the room. "I'm not sure," he says slowly, mulling something over in his mind.

Will's frown only deepens. "We made a promise, once upon a time," he says slowly, a growl almost lifting his last words, "that we would never lie to each other."

The other fallen holds his nerve. He's always been an impassable wall when it comes to reading him. Over time, Will learned his tells. He could know the other better. But now, a

plain of nothing sits in front of him; except for a feigned look of surprise flashing across his face. “I haven’t lied to you, my love.”

“You keep the truth from me,” Will lifts his chin. “I would argue that that is just as bad.”

The hand on his neck doesn’t move. Of all the things to be aware of within the house, it’s the hand that keeps most of his attention. Hannibal’s eyes glint.

At that, Will’s lip lifts in a snarl. “You deliberately put your family in danger,” he growls lowly, “just to prove a point.”

The other fallen’s gaze is cool. “I wanted to see what you would do.”

“And if I died?” Will asks. “If that fallen had killed me?”

“I would never have allowed you to die,” Hannibal clicks his tongue. The hand on Will’s neck moves. Fingers ghost along the column of his neck. Will has to clamp down on the shiver that threatens to rattle up through his spine. Hannibal lowers his head, almost setting their foreheads together. “I was nearby. I would have intervened if needed.”

Will holds Hannibal’s eye. Cocking his head slightly to the side, he whispers. “Would you have?”

He doesn’t get an answer. At the creak of a floorboard, both of them look over to the hallway. Chiyoh stands there, her rifle slung over her shoulder. Her hair falls in tumbles down her back and shoulders, and deep shadows sit underneath her eyes. Her clothes are slightly splattered with water. It’s only then does Will realise that it has started to rain.

Chiyoh regards them both with a cool expression. Her jaw tightens after a moment. “We can move, if you like?” It doesn’t even sound like a question, with how cool yet clipped her voice sounds. Her gaze settles on Hannibal, fire brimming behind her eyes. “Seeing as though you compromised this place.”

Hannibal squares his shoulders, challenging. “This one acted alone,” he says tightly. “If he had a flock with him, more would have swarmed in already. We haven’t been compromised just yet.”

For the years that he’s known her, Will has seen Chiyoh hold Hannibal to his bullshit. The woman never backs down, being one of the few beings within all the realms to openly challenge. “He may have told others,” she glowers, “and if he doesn’t return...”

And Hannibal would have thought about all of that. He’s not a stupid man – but he’s too smart for his own good, at the best of times. He likes to poke at fires and kick hornets nests. Too many years on Earth had been spent with Will observing the fallout of Hannibal’s *curiosities*.

Calm settles over the house. The air sits a bit quieter now. Glancing over his shoulder, Will regards the body. “Get rid of it,” Will snips, eventually brushing past the other fallen. Their shoulders brush, but Will keeps walking. The fallen’s sword lies on the ground. Neither of

them will be able to touch it; but Chiyoh could. The woman dusts her fingers over the pommel, testing it for a bond. When nothing comes to shock her, she lifts the blade and examines it. It's simply made. Not Azrael's best work. Mass-produced, maybe, for one of the many wars angels had with the lower realms. And in his falling, maybe this creature kept a hold of it, waiting for it to be useful again.

"Throw it into the sea, or bury it," Will comments. At Chiyoh's arched eyebrow, he continues. "Unless you want to keep it. We can't use it," he says, nodding back to Hannibal. The other fallen has turned, examining the body. He doesn't touch it, but does lean over, almost scenting the blood. It's dark and almost black, beams of moonlight crawling into the room.

Chiyoh regards the blade. "A rifle is not good for close-quarters," she says, wiping a fleck of blood from the blade with her sleeve.

Will looks away from the other man. What he'll do to the body is anyone's guess – whether it'll be flung into the sea, served at their dinner table in the evening, or mounted to a nearby tree as a warning to others, Hannibal can do what he likes.

Stalking back down the hall, Will pauses outside Abigail's room. The door is cracked open slightly. Peering inside, his heart clenches at the sight of the girl curled up in bed, blankets gathered around her as she sleeps peacefully. He can't smell anything in the air; opiates, or anything else Hannibal might have slipped her to make sure she slept.

Sleep won't come for him. Adrenaline is still trembling his fingers. Even as he curls his hands into fists, trying his best to shake it all away, his blood thrums with the kill.

He never liked killing fallen. Those who wanted to do something with their new lives, or ones that looked so helpless and lost, too weak to do anything but bow their heads as Will lifted his sword.

And he didn't like that kill. It was necessary. Biting the inside of his cheek, he wanders back to his own room, trying to wave away the maelstrom of thoughts swarming within his mind.

Chapter End Notes

Oop.

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sleep never comes. Just before the sun could cast its first few strands of light across the sky, he heard the door creak open, followed by feet softly padding along the carpeted floor. The mattress shifted as Hannibal joined him; but Will pointedly kept his back to the other fallen. He must have known Will was awake. For a few seconds, he simply regarded him before settling down and trying his own attempt at sleep.

Will listened. His breathing didn't change, and he shuffled more than usual. But he still kept his eyes locked on the lancet window looking out on to the ocean. When the sun did appear, he greeted it with bleary and worn out eyes. The sky was quiet. No shooting beams of light streaked across the night sky. Nothing rumbles through the air. Everything goes back to quietly blanketing the house.

Will buries his nose into his pillow. Hannibal's scent coils through him; and he doesn't have the willpower to try and block it out.

What happened to the intruder's body, he doesn't know. He struggles to even want to know. Whether Hannibal took it out to the cliff and flung it over the edge, or whether he carved it up for their dinner table later on, he couldn't guess.

Fingers ghost along his spine, dipping between his scars. The skin there is sensitive. He just amount manages to swallow the shiver that threatens to rumble through him. Silence sits between them for a moment.

"You know me, Will," Hannibal breathes. His words are so soft, barely enough to crack the quiet within the room. A low sigh leaves the other fallen. "I would never allow harm to fall upon you or anyone else within my family. I would protect everyone within my charge; but you don't need my protection. You're strong, my love. You are more than capable of fending for yourself. I wanted to be sure that you could, considering what your body has been through."

Silence laps over them again. He could let Hannibal's words die between them. Go back to faking sleep and wait for the other fallen to slip away. Whether or not that conversation would be waiting for him when he would be drawn in for breakfast, he's pretty sure that it would. And Hannibal would wring words out of him one way or another.

So might as well kill it now.

He turns over, surprised to see the fallen is much further away than he thought. An ample stretch of space was left between them while they both waited for sleep to visit. And it didn't; because Hannibal's arms weren't around him, keeping him close, chasing the shadows away. He always claimed that he slept better when Hannibal was in his bed, curled around him. The

truth was that he always slept with Hannibal there. The walls would crack and crumble and for the first time in a long time, he could let himself be dragged down into darkness.

Facing the other fallen, Will takes him in. Faint shadows settle into the hollows of his face. Eyes blink back at him, but desperately want to stay closed. Hannibal's hand settles between them, fingers skirting along the cotton sheets.

Will sets his jaw. "Have you ever known me to be weak, Hannibal?" he asks, grateful that his voice holds firm, and doesn't crack or rasp with tiredness. Will lifts his chin. "If it's assurance that you need that I'm capable of holding my own, then I'm more than happy to prove it to you. But, as you so often point out to Abigail: we know each other. You've seen my strength for yourself."

Something flickers in Hannibal's eyes.

Will clicks his tongue. Outside, distantly, he can hear footfalls shuffling around outside. Chiyoh and Abigail already stepping out into the house. Some part of him hopes that Hannibal managed to clean up the kitchen. He throws the comforter off of him and makes to get out of bed. He only manages to free half of himself before a hand wraps around his wrist and tugs him back. "Hannibal," Will huffs, setting his free hand on the fallen's chest as he looms over him, bracing his own free hand on the pillows next to his head. Will's nostrils flare. Even under the clean scent of soap, he can smell blood. The metal stings the roof of his mouth. It's a familiar smell; one he's lived with spilling and casting over sand and dirt for millennia. But sitting on Hannibal's skin, mixing with the fallen's natural scent, Will tries not to let it get the better of him.

With his hips just under Hannibal's, and one foot braced against the bed, he could easily get the fallen off of him. And Hannibal would move, if he felt that Will didn't want him pinned. The look in his eye know, a slight glint barely caught by the morning light streaming into the room, tells Will that he *wants* to be thrown off.

If you claim you can fight, fight.

And it's petulant. Scuffling matches. Preening. It's what fledglings do to each other once they've managed to coordinate their wings: when they're barely old enough to swing a sword properly.

As quickly as he can, and ignoring the dull throb in his back, Will grabs on to one of Hannibal's arms, pushing up with his hips, and sends Hannibal down on to the other side of the bed. Before the fallen can get a hold on him, Will catches his hands and pins them. He makes sure to sit on Hannibal's thighs; if they're pinned down on to the mattress, he won't be able to pull the same trick on him.

But the fallen just smiles up at him, eyes softening slightly as he sinks back into the mattress. "I never have any doubts in your strength, my love," Hannibal's voice drops. All at once, Will's skin threatens to set alight. The fallen tilts his head. His eyes have become darker in colour the more time he spends on earth. But being close to him, Will can still make out the tell-tale streaks of red that flicker through them. Hannibal lifts his head off of the pillow, his

eyes drifting down to Will's lips. "But you know how much I confide confidence in experiments."

"With your mortals, maybe," Will's nose brushes Hannibal's. His teeth bare. "But never with *me*."

Delight flashes across Hannibal's face. "With all my knowledge and intuition, I could never entirely product you, my darling." Hannibal moves underneath him, but it's just enough to move him forwards, just until their hips meet and Hannibal can leisurely grind up against the body on top of him.

Will bites on his tongue. A groan threatens to spill out. He squeezes the fallen's wrists, not enough to cut off circulation, or even bruise, but enough to send a message to *keep them there*. He leans down, ignoring Hannibal's lifted chin in favour for his neck. A tendon tenses as his lips dust along the column of skin, skimming down from the fallen's jaw to just below his ear. They've coiled together too often for Will not to know where to put his lips and hands to get just the right sounds out of his lover.

And he tries to bury his leering smile as the fallen tilts his head to the side, straining his neck, an invite to Will to continue. At the first rasp of teeth, Hannibal grinds their hips again. Never a quiet bedmate – never one to let Will work.

"You're glorious," Hannibal hums, his eyelids flickering closed as tremors shudder through him. Will nips at the juncture of his shoulder and neck. *Continue*. Drawing in a shuddering breath, Hannibal keeps his words as level as he can. "I remember you during your hunts, during your self-imposed exile. You were always a mystery to me," he breaks off when Will's grip tightens on his wrists. "Do you remember Palermo? When you met me by a chapel, wearing more blood than rain?"

He remembers it. He remembers all of it. And Hannibal knows that he does. He didn't feel an ounce of regret, or shame, kissing the fallen in front of that chapel – something wicked in his mind ordering him to take Hannibal inside and make love to him there, underneath frescoes and the marble heads of saints watching. And the angels of heaven just beyond the roof; would they have glowered down at him, or was their attention drawn elsewhere within the world? It had been a busy century then, with the earthly plain heaving and warping through a change.

They could have found them then. They could have found them any time, if someone had only said the word.

Will squeezes his wrists again. *Leave them there*. Nimble fingers make quick work of Hannibal's sleep-shirt, buttons deftly untangled out and the lapels of the shirt parted just in time for Will to get his lips across the bared skin there. He pushes the fabric out of the way. Hannibal's body hasn't changed in muscle in all the years that he's known him. But the adornments have changed. The thin slivers of scars stand out, the worst of them knotted and lifted above the plains of Hannibal's chest. The worst are on his back. The loss of wings and the lashing of whips and canes. The first of the fallen weren't that well-liked by Father's pets. Those who were found by them first often wished it was Will, or any other Watcher, who might have stumbled across them first.

But Hannibal wrenches off his shirt, tossing it into some corner of the room before his hands gather the hem of Will's. His lip lifts in a growl. "You were to *stay*," the words grumbled against Hannibal's skin.

"My love, the morning is ageing," Hannibal clicks his tongue, nabbing the bottom of Will's shirt and bringing it over his head. Those same deft fingers immediately go to the ties of his sweatpants. Hannibal wrenches open just enough space to slip down and take Will in hand.

He barely has enough time to bury the moan against Hannibal's chest. Even dry, the pressure around his cock is just enough to get sounds clawing up Will's throat. *Fine.* Abandoning his work on the fallen's chest, Will retaliates, yanking Hannibal's sleep pants down just enough to take him too. He keeps his voice low, knowing that someone could come looking for them. But he presses one last kiss to the centre of Hannibal's chest, delighted to find his heart rate has quickened. "The choice is yours, *my love*; make it quick or make it good."

And there's a war in those dark eyes. Hannibal's hand is already moving; just as Will knows what to do to get sounds out of him, the fallen knows Will's body as intimately too. The familiar squeeze and pull, the twisting of his hand just at the head of Will's cock. A shadow of a smile flashes along his lip as the first drop of precum beads at the tip. He gathers enough to slicken the way, tightening his grip. "It has always been good, hasn't it, darling," Hannibal rumbles. "And we were never quick."

There were times Hannibal made sure of it. Even when Will would have to leave the next morning, just in case travelling fledglings stumbled across him in the bed of a fallen, Hannibal made sure to leave him with a bruised neck and sore hips.

And he can't help but be delighted that it hasn't changed.

A coil begins to tighten in his core. Will tightens his own hand, smirking when Hannibal's hips lift into it. He sets his teeth across the plain of the fallen's stomach, twitching underneath the scrape of canines. "You were always good to me," Will purrs, "and good for me." Hannibal's breath quickens. "Will you be good now? You're so desperate, underneath that front you cloak yourself in. Did it please you? My falling was sealed with your teeth and hands."

Will watches Hannibal's face. It tightens slightly, desperate to hold on to the calm that's slowly slipping out from him. His hips grind and lift. Will tightens his hand, strokes and twists until a groan worms its way out of Hannibal's throat. "*Knowing* you, I bet you were delighted," Will growls, thrusting into Hannibal's hand. His other paws at Will's side, nails scraping along any stretch of skin he can find. "My scars belong to you. You did this to me." His voice is nothing more than a rasp.

The maroon of Hannibal's eyes brightens as the fallen growls up at him, his jaw tight, containing a louder moan as his hips finally stutter and still. Will sets his forehead against Hannibal's, leering a smile when the falling tries to catch his lips. The hand on his cock tightens in retaliation. *Never quick and always good*, he reminds himself. A thrum of pleasure rattles up his spine as he's caught in Hannibal's free arm; the fallen easily throwing him back on to the bed and looming over him. The fallen ducks down, setting his lips to Will's length. Bowed lips and firm hands will be the death of him. He made his peace with that long ago. A

groan leaves him as he sets his head back against the pillows, caught between wanting to lose himself in the thrum of pleasure lapping through him, or look down and watch Hannibal take him into his mouth.

At the first envelop of heat, Will's groans tighten and strain, until the coil inside him snaps and his hips lift. Hannibal swallows around him, a hand set against Will's stomach. The firm pressure pushes his hips back down. A quiet command to still and let what's rushing through his veins have at him.

Hannibal parts, pressing a light kiss to Will's abdomen. His lips quirks. Words on them, but he decides not to speak. Instead, Hannibal slips out of bed, fixing his sweatpants over his hips. His shirt is lost somewhere, haphazardly tossed into some corner and forgotten about. Will shuffles up on the bed, resting his back against the mound of pillows. His eyes are drawn to Hannibal's back, once the fallen turns. Two long-since healed, but mangled, scars run along the length of his spine. Faded white lines mar the skin, standing out against the slight colour Hannibal has managed to catch from the sun.

The fallen doesn't seem bothered by his marks at all as he bends down for his shirt. The muscles of his back ripple as he pulls it over himself. Will's lips thin. He'll be like that, someday. He's looking forward to it; when the last of his blessed blood thins out from his body, when he can bend over to grab something on the floor, or not tense up in anticipation of pain when he feels a draft blowing in through a window.

But Hannibal has been scarred far longer than he has. He didn't know the fallen during those first months, when scars would bleed and weep and the body had to reconfigure itself into becoming something mortal – well, not entirely mortal, but not what it used to be.

Will blinks as Hannibal shuffles over to his side of the bed. He lifts his chin as the fallen leans down, pecking a quick kiss to Will's forehead. His lips linger for a moment. A thrum of warmth spreads through him. When the fallen pulls away, Will has to swallow the slight whine that threatens to spill out from his lips. Hannibal reaches out, catching Will's chin between his thumb and forefinger. They keep close, almost sharing a breath as it mingles between them. Maroon eyes bleed into his.

With nothing else worth saying, Hannibal slips away from him. The fallen shuffles out of the room, grabbing an old red sweater and pulling it over him before stepping out into the hallway. When he slips out of sight, Will's shoulders slouch.

The morning is quiet.

Getting dressed is becoming less of an ordeal. He's got it down to maybe ten minutes, clad in a pair of jeans and a loose tee that barely grazes his scars. He still can't reach up to brush his own hair – which is fine, the waves curl and fall in a way that doesn't bother him. And

Hannibal has always had a thing for his hair, constantly running his fingers through it when they curl up together at night.

His dagger stays attached to his hip. The hem of his shirt skirt over the blade, obstructing it from view. It's easier to carry than a sword. His fingers graze the pommel every so often, a small assurance to himself that it's there, ready to be drawn at the first change of the wind.

Everything is eerily silent. Some part of him wants to enjoy it. It's quiet, and he can count on one hand the number of times he was allowed to enjoy quiet moments. He's distantly aware of Hannibal and Abigail in the kitchen; the fallen and nephilim working on a small lunch for them all. For the meek cowl the girl has pulled over herself, Will watches out of the corner of his eye as she speaks to Hannibal as if he were her parent – her eyes crinkling as she smiles, watching the fallen intently as he shows her how to thinly slice some fruit that Chiyoh gathered this morning.

He looks out on to the cliff. The sea is calm, barely rippling as it catches the bleary mid-afternoon light. Even with the knowledge that someone was always watching him, waiting for him to take a wrong footing somewhere, there were moments of peace. It would lap over him, easing his muscles as he was usually lain out in Hannibal's bed, or walking with the fallen through whatever town or village it was that he had hidden himself in. But the moments never lasted long. Something always came to shatter the peace.

Gentle fingers skirt the small of his back. "My love?"

Will glances over his shoulder. Hannibal stands close, almost pressed flush against him. His fingers slip away as Will turns fully. "Hmm?"

"Lunch is ready," Hannibal gestures to the kitchen. Abigail stands by the island, setting plates down and serving up her own portion. A small feast is lain out on the island, fruits and a small load of bread. A white plate sits among it; thin slices of red meat curled around in a circle, cooked ever so slightly.

His kill, Will supposes, nostrils flaring. Fallen meat has a peculiar smell. Not quite human and not quite animal. He glances over to Hannibal. "A last supper?" Will arches an eyebrow.

Hannibal tries to hide his smile – nothing more than a quirk of the corner of his lip. He leads them over to the island, graciously accepting a plate from Abigail. The girl keeps her eyes lowered, but she does watch them under a curtain of hair that falls out from behind her ear. She watches when she thinks that they aren't looking. Will has grown too used to the feeling of eyes on him not to notice.

With their plates full, Hannibal gestures for them to sit. Chiyoh is absent, but that's become a normal occurrence. Where she's stalked off to, he doesn't know, but Hannibal's shoulders are loose and relaxed. And even if anxious thoughts nip and bare their teeth at the back of his neck, Will can't help but relax ever so slightly into the meal. It's familiar. He can remember most of their meals together; all of them banquets and feasts sprawled across tables. A felled fallen couldn't thrive – that's what wing-bearers believed. But Hannibal thrived. He provided shelter and meals for those who fell nearby; fallen that could have something to offer him. He

didn’t say it outright, but Will knew that he felt some sliver of pity for them. As soon as they were strong enough, they were on their way out into the world.

No matter when it was he met the fallen, Hannibal always greeted him with a full table and a warm bed. It wasn’t until later he found out about the meat.

Father breathed life into these creatures, just as He did with us, he once explained, shamelessly trimming fat off of a fat loin. Will watches his hands as Hannibal effortlessly stripped the meat of fat and silverskin. The fallen’s hands were always a weak point for him; and watching them work with such surety, it put a coil in Will’s gut. He remembers how Hannibal’s face suddenly soured. *I only hunt animals, Will. Father’s pets that act out of turn and choose to bite their master’s hand*.

Countless millennia spent on this plain; and he knew exactly what kind of animals Hannibal spoke of. He watched horrors unfold as time slipped by him. Every town and city had its own circle of hell to navigate – where the vilest of creatures would lurk and hunt. And Will’s job was never to hunt *them*. They were still created for this plain, and it would be up to their peers to sort them out if need be. Will’s line of work concerned his own kind.

The lunch lain out in front of him isn’t the most dramatic or sprawling of courses ever presented to him, but with the situation as it stands, Will can commend the fallen for doing well with what he was given.

They eat in silence. Occasionally, Hannibal lures Abigail into a light conversation about her life back at the hospital. Will doesn’t miss how the girl’s eyes slightly glint as she recounts her time there. Even stashed away, out of sight, she made her friends within the hospital in other nephilim and injured fallen. A small smile lifts her lip. The familiarity of memories flickering before her.

Will's ear twitch at the sound of the front door clicking shut. Chiyoh stalks into the room, as quiet as ever. She regards their table for a moment before her lips thin. "It's quiet," she aims at Hannibal.

The fallen nods, gesturing to the meal lain out in front of them. "Would you like something to eat?"

Dark eyes run over the small mound of food gathered in the middle of the island. She shakes her head, a few wisps of hair dusting her cheeks.

“One of our serpent’s acolytes never returned from their hunt.”

The silence in the consul is deafening. Barachiel stands before them, not bothering to stalk over to his own throne. There’s no point. He will be leaving again soon. Uriel is still with the serpent, Gabriel notes – making sure that it doesn’t slither away while they’re backs are

turned. An uneasy alliance binds them together, but the serpent is beginning to coil, ready to strike out. Whether his venom is just for Zadkiel and his mate, or for someone else, Gabriel isn't sure anymore. And there aren't many moments where he can say that he isn't sure. Someone will definitely be struck. Maybe all of them, if they keep stalking around each other like wild dogs, hackles raised and teeth bared.

Michael's fingers tap a nonsensical pattern against the arm of his throne. He cocks his head to the side, mulling over Barachiel's words. He knows about the hospital, about the nephilim. Gabriel allowed that information to slip. A necessary evil, if he were to be truthful with himself. Sometimes Michael's rage must be fed the right amount of kindling, just to be sure that sparks don't erupt and cause a wildfire. The archangel sets his jaw. "A human must have said something to save their own skin," he says lowly, looking off to some corner of the room. Gleaming white marble glares back at him. Golden eyes narrow. "Why didn't your serpent send more with his follower?"

"The fallen was sure that he could hunt and fall Zadkiel himself," Barachiel says, his lips thinning into an unimpressed expression. "Fallen are prone to flights of fantasy. Our serpent merely allowed it."

"If Zadkiel was strong enough to fight back," Azrael says from the other side of the room, a soft frown creasing his brow, "better to send one than an army."

Michael's expression changes. "A test?"

Gabriel watches his brother – a storm of thought flashes over his face, none of it entirely comprehensible. It suddenly breaks when a leering smile lifts the corner of his lip. His golden eyes catch fire. "Find the hunting trail of that fallen," he says, standing from his throne. The sword by his waist rattles as it knocks against his armour. "Let the serpent root out our dragon. And let's have an end to this."

Barachiel lifts his chin. "You would have us strike now?" Even though the question slips out of his lips, the archangel doesn't seem too bothered to put up much of a debate on the matter. Barachiel's blade gleams by his side. It's been clean for too long.

"Someone knew where to find that creature," Michael's lip lifts in a snarl. "*Find him*. Lead your serpent and his army of felled to him. I want Zadkiel and our serpent dead by tomorrow's sunrise."

A silent dismissal. Azrael is the first to go, having the knowledge to stand and incline his head to Michael before escaping the room. The others follow. Michael settles back into his throne, slouching, setting his fingers against his lips. A warrior's eyes, deeply set with a millennia's worth of memories from past gauntlets and wars, stare out on to the throne room's floor. But they don't focus on anything. The soldier retreats into his mind.

Barachiel inclines his head all the same, turning on his heel and stalking away. Gabriel slips from his throne. His robes fly behind him as he stalks out to meet his brother on the lip of the bridge. The expanse of the worlds and plains span out before them. "Let me come with you," he schools his voice into something more befitting an archangel. Barachiel arches an eyebrow. "Once you find the trail, I'll notify Michael and his soldiers."

Barachiel's eyes are scrutinising. He tilts his head. "Gabriel: our only link of communication between worlds," he muses, letting his gaze run over the archangel in his entirety. "Who has been exceptionally quiet ever since our search began."

The archangel lifts his chin. A challenge. "And risk a message being intercepted?" he asks slowly, letting the words lap over Barachiel's ears. The archangel has trouble hearing him on the best of days. "I have held counsel with our brother, while you and Uriel trailed after a lunatic like loyal dogs. I never knew that you had such restraint; really, the fact that the serpent is still alive is beyond me."

"We need him," Barachiel says. There's a slight flash of teeth. The words aren't his. His own sit caged behind a clenched jaw, trying to fight their way out. If Barachiel had his way, if he had the resources that Michael had, the plains would be drowned in blood by now. And Father would issue a grand restart, and who only knows what would happen after then.

The archangel's eyes harden. "We don't need you or your larks there." Barachiel's wings plume behind him, feathers sticking out against a faint thrum of energy lapping through the air. "Michael will be able to find us just fine."

His teeth gnash. He'll be there anyway – Michael will ensure that every angel with a hint of plumage will be drawing arms and flocking down to the lower plains to root the dragon and the serpent out. Even if Michael envisions himself to be the own to down them both, he'll request an audience: fledglings and plumed angels alike to not only witness the glory of vanquishing the evil, but a warning. No one in their right mind would go against Michael with a dragon's blood still dripping from his blade.

Gabriel sets his jaw. The air around them nips and sizzles, charging with energy that wants to lash out and whip at something. "See to it that what needs to be done is done," he says simply, standing back and letting Barachiel's wings unfurl.

The archangel settles him with a quirked smirk. "What needs to be done will be done."

Will's hackles lift. A shudder rattles up his spine as he clambers up from the ground. Hannibal sticks out a hand – one that Will knocks away. The faint brush of their skin is almost scalding. Will glances down at his hand to make sure his skin hasn't blistered. It's red, but numb from the cold. He gets to his feet by himself, his eyes going straight to the grey expanse of sky that stretches out towards the horizon. He doesn't even hear Hannibal calling for him, trying to reach out to stop him shuffling over towards the edge of the cliff.

"Do you feel that?" Will asks, his voice almost lost as the sea beneath them starts to lash and whip against the cliff.

Hannibal looks out, scanning his eyes over the horizon. The fallen's jaw is tight as he regards the air, but he doesn't shiver as Will does. And it's not the cold; it's not the fresh ocean wind

barrelling up from the cliff face to nip against his skin. It's not the cooling sweat on his skin, sticking his shirt to him. The air is static, hissing at him. It's a feeling he's gotten uncomfortably comfortable with.

Will's ears twitch at the sound of a car's engine. He turns just in time to see a car pull up by the house. Chiyoh lets the door slam shut behind her as she stalks into the courtyard, her rifle neatly tucked against her back. The grip on the strap is white-knuckled. Her face is as unreadable as always.

Hannibal lifts his chin, approaching her with folded arms.

A quiet conversation flitters between the two of them. Will narrows his eyes. Their lips barely move, but with their eyes locked together, Will knows their ability to say what needs to be said with just a look. Chiyoh inclines her head. For the first time in a long time, the woman's arms coil around Hannibal's shoulders as she draws him in for a short hug. Will's tongue sits heavily in his mouth. Hannibal hugs her back, setting his chin on her shoulder. Turning his head slightly, he sets his lips to the shell of her ear.

Take her far from this place.

You know where to go.

We will meet you when it's done.

The dagger by his side hums. Letting his fingers drift over the pommel, he lets the thrums of it wash through him. *Adamas* blades know their masters. They're almost sentient beings in their own rights, able to pick up and read their handler's emotions and fears. And right now, Will's heart might just burst out of his chest. His tongue sits heavily in his mouth. He casts a wide glance over the sea again. Everything is cast into different shades of grey. A swirl of blackening clouds settles over the horizon, blocking out the last feeble attempts of the winter sun trying to get through to the world underneath. The sea churns beneath it; violent lashes of waves whipping against the cliff face. Even perched as high up as they are, Will blinks as saltwater sprays up and flicks his face.

He doesn't hear Hannibal. At the first brush of fingers against his, a small hum of warmth laps through him. Looking down at their hands, Will blinks at the sight of them coiling together.

Hannibal's face is stubbornly impassive. But he's good at reading the fallen's eyes. Even though they've darkened in colour over the years, the fallen behind them has stayed the same. And Will can read him like a book. "What is it?" And his voice is so low that it could be lost by a passing gust of wind.

The grip on his hand tightens. Hannibal has heard him just fine. The fallen looks down at the smooth cobbles of the courtyard, his brow twitching into a frown. "There was an attack on the hospital," he says quietly. Will has to tilt his head slightly to hear him. "Francis sent his followers on scouting missions. The one you killed was a part of that group, but went solo. His

“When did he order this?”

“Someone at the hospital must have said something,” Hannibal reasons, casting his eyes to the sky. “Or the dragon has enough fallen to cover a wide area. But your kill’s absence will be noticed.”

And we’ll be found. The words don’t even have to be said. They sour the air wrapping around them.

Will’s throat bobs. “And what would you have us do?”

Something flickers in Hannibal’s eyes. Something that flitters away just as quickly as it appeared. “You and I have spent too long running and hiding,” he almost muses, taking in the swirling greyscale out at sea.

Their joined hands sit between them, fingers almost-crushing as they hold on. As if some stray gust of wind would rip them apart. The thought of it only has Will’s hand tightening. If he’s to fall again, it’ll be with Hannibal. Even if he were to drag the fallen down to Limbo with him, they won’t be separated. He doesn’t think they could survive it otherwise.

Chapter End Notes

An extra long chapter for the slight wait! So, a life update; I've started working again and while it's great and I'm very lucky to be in a position with a job and earning money, it does mean that I'm coming home very tired and not in the mood to write. I will finish out this fic because I actually love it so much - and I can't say that a lot about anything nowadays lmao - but it might be a while in between chapters. But nothing like the waits of past because geez...

End Notes

Kudos and Comments are very much appreciated!

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